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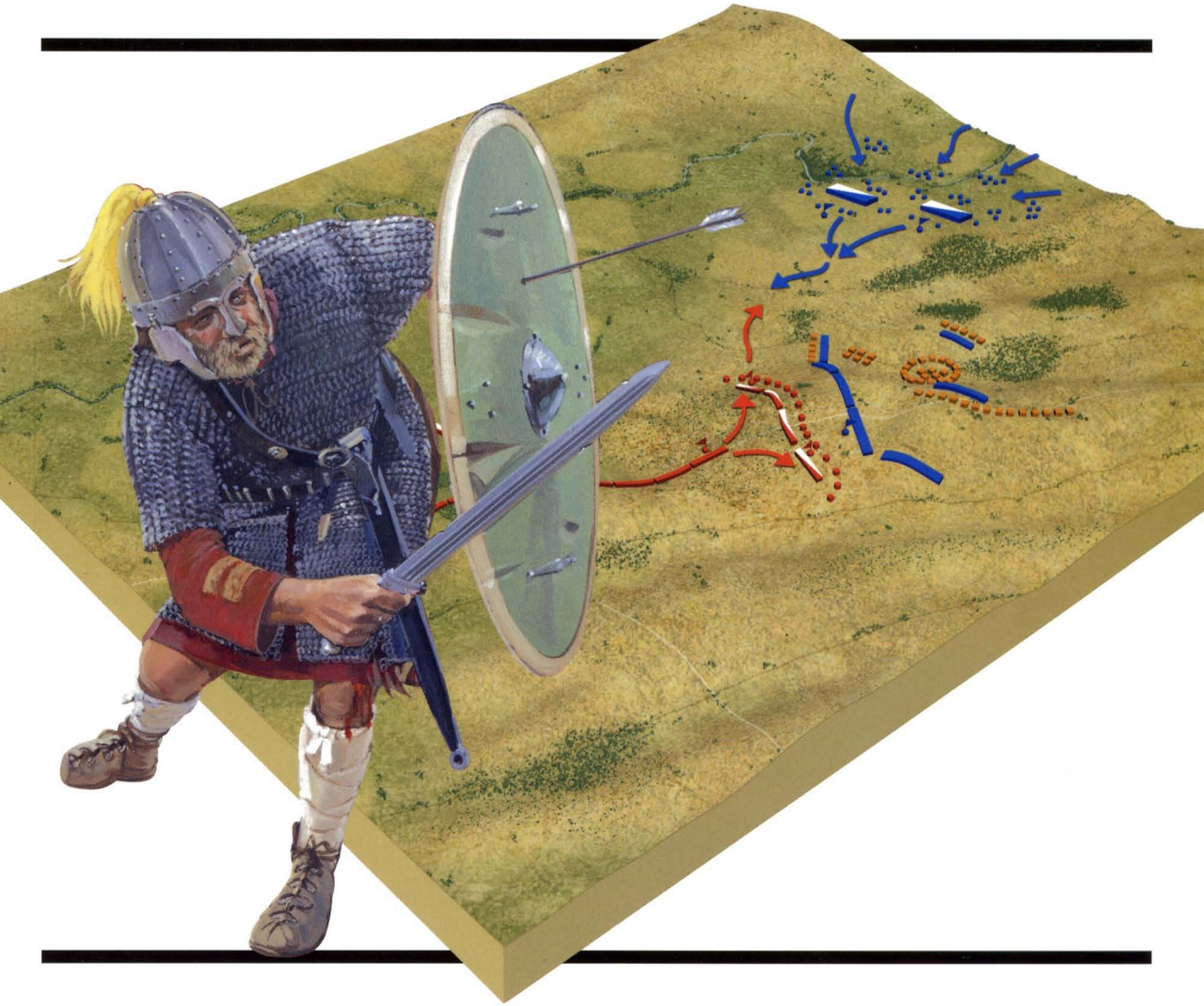
ADRIANOPLE AD 378



THE GOTHS CRUSH ROME'S LEGIONS

SIMON MACDOWALL

VISIT…

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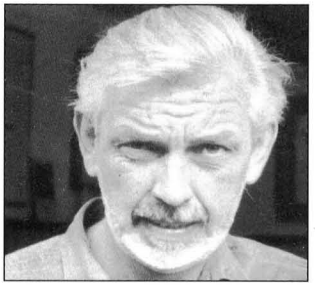
SIMON MACDOWALL is a former army officer with a deep interest in military history, especially the period around the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West. After 22 years in the Canadian army he worked for several years on NATO International Staff and is now a senior civil servant in the British Government. His combination of practical military background with his knowledge and understanding of the later Roman give him a unique perspective on the military aspects of this fascinating era. After living in Canada, Germany and Belgium, and seeing service in Central America, Bosnia and Kosovo, Simon now lives in Oxford England.



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CAMPAIGN 84

ADRIANOPLE AD 378

THE GOTHS CRUSH ROME'S LEGIONS

SERIES EDITOR: LEE JOHNSON

CAMPAIGN 84

ADRIANOPLE AD 378

THE GOTHS CRUSH ROME'S LEGIONS

WRITTEN BY
SIMON MacDOWALL

BATTTLESCENE PLATES BY
HOWARD GERRARD

OSPREY
MILITARY

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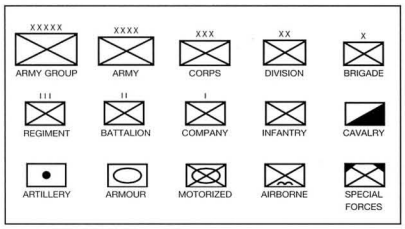

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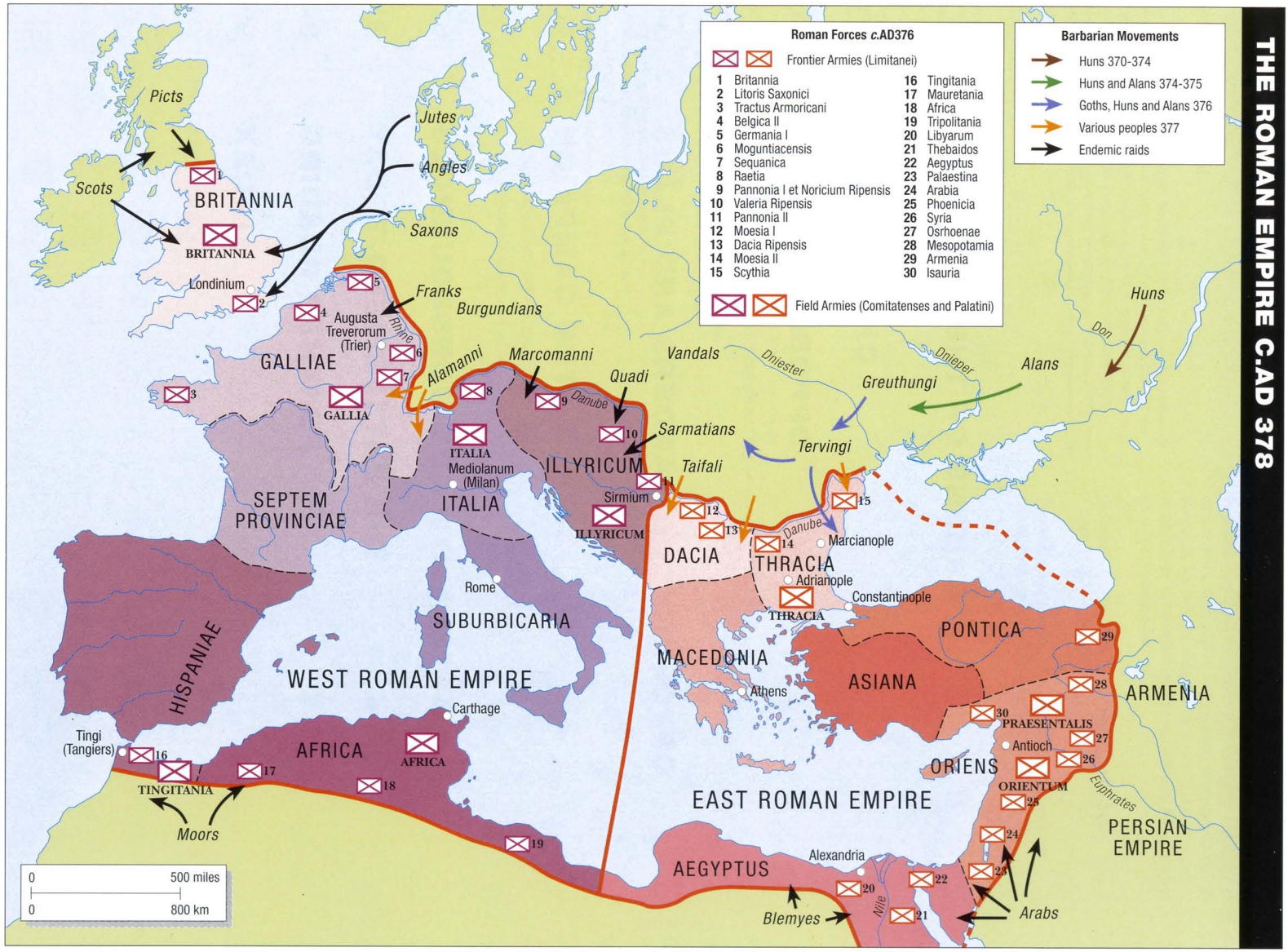
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Sirmium
ILLYRICUM
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AFRICA
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TINGITANIA
Moors
EAST ROMAN EMPIRE
Euphrates
PERSIAN EMPIRE
AEGYPTUS
Alexandria
Nile
Blemyes
Arabs
0 500 miles
0 800 km

ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

At dawn on 9 August AD 378, the East Roman Emperor Valens marched out of the city of Adrianople (originally Hadrianopolis, now Edirne in European Turkey) at the head of an elite army of veteran Roman soldiers. He was determined to crush the marauding bands of Goths who had crossed the Danube as refugees two years earlier. By nightfall the Emperor, along with two thirds of his men, lay dead on the field. According to the contemporary historian Ammianus Marcellinus, himself a Roman officer: 'No battle in our history except Cannae [Hannibal's great victory in 216 BC] was such a massacre.'

The Battle of Adrianople is arguably one of the most significant battles of the Roman period. It has often been described as a victory of cavalry over infantry and has been credited as marking the end of the era of infantry dominance on the battlefield and ushering in the era of the medieval knight. Although such a claim stretches the point too far, after Adrianople Roman armies never again took the field looking anything like the legions of classical times.

The army that was destroyed by the Goths on that fateful day was the kind of force Julius Caesar might have understood. The soldiers' dress and equipment may have differed from the days of the Republic and the proportions of light troops and cavalry would have been higher, but essentially it was a force of drilled heavy infantry supported by other

The Golden Gate of Constantinople which opened on to the Via Egnatia, the main road to Rome which ran through Adrianople. (Author's photo)

A German captive, probably a Goth, from a fragment of a 3rd century arch now in Florence. The Goths overran the Balkans and raided the Black Sea and Aegean coastal areas in the second half of the 3rd century. (Author's photo)

troops. After Adrianople the character of the Roman army changed for ever. The regular infantry armies were increasingly sidelined by bands of mounted retainers, usually Germans. The Goths, who won themselves the right to settle inside the Roman Empire after the campaign, were the first of many Germanic peoples to carve out a kingdom for themselves. Twenty years later they went on to sack Rome herself.

Romans and Goths

The Roman Empire in the latter part of the 4th century AD was very much on the defensive and had been for many years. In the previous century, economic collapse, barbarian raids and endemic civil war almost destroyed the Empire. A series of vigorous soldier-emperors from Illyricum (modern Yugoslavia) restored order and one of them – Diocletian (AD 284-305) – reorganised the imperial administration, stabilising prices and imposing a rigid central control. Although the Illyrian emperors saved the Empire from anarchy and collapse, many of the problems remained. Diocletian's attempt to set up a smooth system of succession failed. Fourth century emperors, therefore, had to rely on the army not only to defend the frontiers of the Empire but also to fend off usurpers and rivals.

All the frontiers were under pressure. Britain was menaced by the Saxons, Picts and Scots while vigorous federations of German tribes such as the Franks and Alamanni pushed against the Rhine frontier. In the east there was a virtually permanent state of hostilities with the Sassanid Persians. In 363 the Emperor Julian led Rome's last major offensive operation when he invaded the Persian Empire but, despite tactical success on the battlefield, the expedition ended in his death and an ignominious retreat. The African, Egyptian and Syrian frontiers were also subject to endemic raiding by the Moors, Blemyes and Arabs.

On the Danube frontier it was the Goths who posed the greatest threat. The Goths were a Germanic people whose origin is disputed by modern historians. In their own traditions they emigrated from Scandinavia through modern Poland and Ukraine to the shores of the Black Sea. The 6th century Gothic historian Jordanes says: 'From this island of Scandza [Scandinavia], as from a hive of races or a womb of nations, the Goths are said to have come forth long ago under their king, Berig by name. As soon as they disembarked from their ships and set foot on the land, they straightaway gave their name to the place. And even today it is said to be called Gothiscandza. Soon they moved from here to the abodes of the Ulmerugi, who then dwelt on the shores of the Ocean, where they pitched camp, joined battle with them and drove them from their homes. They then subdued their neighbours, the Vandals, and thus added to their victories. But when the number of people increased greatly and Filimer, son of Gadaric, reigned as king – about the fifth since Berig – he decided that the army of the Goths with their families should move from that region. In search of suitable homes and pleasant places they came to the land of Scythia.'

For much of Roman history there was little interaction between the Goths and the Empire. Tacitus, writing in the 1st century, mentions them in passing and they were too far from the frontier to have much of an impact. In the 3rd century, however, the Goths expanded westward and burst on the scene with a vengeance. They sacked Histria on the mouth

of the Danube in 238 then went on to ravage Moesia and Thrace (modern Bulgaria). In 251 a Gothic army led by Cniva destroyed a Roman army and killed the Emperor Decius.

Seaborne raids between 253–271 increasingly supplemented land attacks across the lower Danube frontier. These at first concentrated on the coastal areas of the Black Sea, but encouraged by success they spread beyond the Bosporus and into the Aegean. Bands of Goths and their allies ravaged the coasts of Asia Minor, Greece, Macedonia and Cyprus and then penetrated inland sacking Ephesus and Athens. Stability was finally restored by the Emperor Claudius who won a decisive victory over a Gothic force at Naissus (Nis in modern Serbia) in 269, followed up by Aurelian who restored the Danube frontier after formally abandoning the province of Dacia (modern Romania).

For the next hundred years Goths and Romans faced each other across the Danube in a state of uneasy coexistence with relations wavering between hostility, truce and alliance. The Emperor Constantine built a 2.5 km long bridge across the Danube in 328 to enable Roman armies to more easily take offensive action against the Goths and to strike into their home territory to exact revenge for any raids against the Empire. After a successful campaign, Constantine concluded a formal peace treaty in 332 with those Goths (the Tervingi) living directly on the frontier. Under its terms the Romans paid the Goths an annual tribute while the Goths reportedly were to provide 40,000 soldiers as *foederati* (federates) to fight in the Roman army when called on. The figure of 40,000 is certainly an exaggeration and far more than the bands living along the Danube could ever hope to raise. However, after 332 Goths did fight for Rome on several occasions. Ammianus Marcellinus records, for example, that 3,000 Goths went to the aid of the usurper Procopius in 365, implying that they did so under the terms of the treaty.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE HUNS

In the early 370s the equilibrium was shattered by the arrival of the Huns on the eastern fringes of the Gothic territories. This nomadic people from the steppes of Central Asia first overran the Alans, another nomadic people living east of the Don River. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the surviving Alans pushed westward into the 'rich and extensive realm' of the Greuthungi, a Gothic clan led by Ermenrich, who lived north of the Black Sea between the Dniester and Dnieper rivers. After a brief resistance Ermenrich committed suicide, possibly as a sacrifice to the gods to protect his people. Vithimir, who succeeded Ermenrich, employed some Huns to help him against the Alans but according to Ammianus: 'After many defeats he was overwhelmed by superior force and lost his life in battle.'

Leadership of the Greuthungi then passed to Alatheus and Saphrax, 'experienced commanders of proven courage.' The Greuthungi retreated westward across the Dniester into the territory of the Tervingi, the Gothic clan inhabiting the land between the Danube and Dniester. There they built some defensive works while Athanaric, leader of the Tervingi, advanced eastwards and took up a defensive position along the

The Goths crossed the Danube and entered Roman territory as refugees. This was a whole people on the move rather than an invading army. Throughout the campaign long columns of men, women, children and animals had to keep moving in search of food and provisions. (Howard Gerrard)

This stele found near the mouth of the Don River probably depicts an Alan warrior. Although most Alans were light horse archers a small number probably fought like the Sarmatians as armoured lancers. Armoured cavalrymen from the steppes typically did not carry shields and held their long lances with both hands. (Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg)

banks of the Dniester but some distance away from the fortifications of the Greuthungi.

It was the Huns, rather than the Alans who made the next attack, this time hitting the Tervingi. Their highly mobile light cavalry by-passed Athanaric's scouts, forded the river by moonlight and launched a surprise attack on the Goths. Defeated, Athanaric sought refuge in the rugged mountainous terrain of modern Romania and started building new defensive works to protect his people from the Huns and Alans.

The rapid success of the nomads against both Gothic clans spread terror along the frontier. Ammianus describes the Huns as 'abnormally savage' and as a 'wild race, moving without encumbrances and consumed by a savage passion to pillage the property of others.' While the Alans 'take as much delight in the dangers of war as quiet and peaceful folk in ease and leisure.' No doubt their savage reputation increased with every victory so that by 376 rumour spread amongst all the German tribes that: 'an unknown race of men had appeared from some remote corner of the earth, uprooting and destroying everything in its path like a whirlwind descending from high mountains.' Panic ensued: 'Terrifying rumours got about of a new and unusually violent commotion among the peoples of the North. Men heard that over the whole area extending from the Marcomanni and Quadi (Germanic tribes living along the upper Danube) to the Black Sea, a savage horde of remote tribes, driven from their homes by unexpected pressure, were roaming with their families in the Danube region.' (Ammianus Marcellinus)

Crossing the Danube

By 376 the outlook for the Goths was bleak. Driven from their homes and land and holed up in mountain refuges or behind fortifications, they would have had little to live off. Having failed to protect his people from the Huns, Athanaric began to lose authority and a large number of the

Spangenhelm-type helmets, made up of four or six plates held together by reinforcement bands, were popular with Goths and Romans along the Danube frontier. Variations of this style remained in use for several centuries. This example is a 5th–6th century Gothic helmet from southern France. It originally would have had cheek and neck guards attached to it. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Tervingi deserted him. This breakaway group, led by Alavivus and Fritigern, applied for sanctuary inside the Roman Empire.

At this time two men ruled the Empire. Flavius Valens had been ruling the East since 364, while his young nephew Flavius Gratianus (Gratian) had just been elevated as the Western Emperor in 375 on the death of his father Valentinian. Valens had campaigned against the Goths a few years earlier (367–369) and had concluded a formal peace treaty with Athanaric's Tervingi. It is highly probable that part of this agreement was for the Tervingi to supply troops for the Roman army. When Alavivus and Fritigern applied for asylum, Valens was campaigning against the powerful Persian Empire. A source of fresh recruits was probably welcome and in any case with his army engaged on another front it would have been difficult for him to oppose the Goths if they tried to force the issue. Consequently the request was granted and Roman officials were given orders to help move the Tervingi across the Danube, provide them with supplies and give them land to settle.

'Once the Emperor's permission to cross the Danube and settle in parts of Thrace had been granted, the work of transportation went on day and night. The Goths embarked by troops on boats and rafts and canoes made from hollowed tree trunks. The crowd was such that, though the river is the most dangerous in the world and was then swollen by frequent rains, a large number tried to swim and were drowned in their struggle against the force of the stream.' (Ammianus Marcellinus)

A sudden large influx of refugees is never easy to deal with. Even with modern technology, airlifts and organised charities, the exodus of refugees from Kosovo overwhelmed Macedonia and Albania in 1999. The situation facing Lupicinus, the *comes* (count and commander of regional troops) in charge of Thrace, would have been nearly impossible to deal with even for the most competent of officials: an armed group of asylum seekers, who less than 10 years ago were at war with Rome, suddenly arriving in their thousands – homeless, hungry and in

This magnificent Persian masked helmet shows the face of a 4th Century Sassanid king, probably Shapur II (309–379). The main East Roman army was engaged in operations in Armenia against Shapur's forces at the outbreak of the Adrianople campaign. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

desperate need of supplies and resettlement. Unfortunately neither Lupicinus nor Maximus (the *dux* – commander of frontier troops) was up to the task. Ammianus claims that 'their sinister greed was the source of all our troubles ... The barbarians, after crossing the river were distressed by want of food, and these loathsome generals devised an abominable form of barter. They collected all the dogs that their insatiable greed could find and exchanged each of them for a slave.'

Although the Tervingi were supposed to have been moved on and resettled further south, the Roman officials kept them in the area of their original crossing because, according to Ammianus, they were making a good profit by selling them poor quality food at inflated prices. There may, however, be another reason, which has a modern parallel. When the Kosovo Albanians first fled into Macedonia in 1999, it was intended that they should be resettled in several locations around the country. However, the Macedonian authorities panicked when it seemed that the number of refugees exceeded expectations and threatened to upset the delicate ethnic balance in the region. As a result they were kept in the border area without food, shelter or medical supplies and only allowed to move on after intense international media attention and direct NATO involvement. The situation in 376 must have been very similar: Roman authorities feeling overwhelmed by the situation while the Goths, with no means of subsistence saw revolt as the only way out.

Meanwhile, the Greuthungi, still led by Alatheus and Saphrax, had also moved to the Danube and made a similar request for asylum. Another group under Farnobius accompanied them. This time the request was refused. Presumably because the Tervingi could provide enough potential recruits for the army and since resettling them was proving difficult, there was no incentive to let any more Goths across. Athanaric, leading the remaining Tervingi who had not broken away with Fritigern and Alavivus, also moved to the Danube. However, he was persuaded, under the terms of the treaty he had signed with Valens in 369, not to set foot in Roman territory and he withdrew back to his mountain refuge.

The Greuthungi were not prepared to take no for an answer and when Lupicinus' troops were distracted, dealing with potential trouble among the Tervingi, they made a move: 'Seeing that our men were engaged elsewhere, and that the boats which patrolled the river to prevent their crossing had ceased to operate, the Greuthungi took advantage of the opportunity to slip over on roughly made rafts, and pitched their camp a long way from Fritigern. The latter, however, whose native shrewdness served to protect him against any eventuality, found a way to both obey his orders and at the same time unite with these powerful kings.' (Ammianus Marcellinus)

The situation was now critical. Still without land or homes and desperately short of food, discontent was rising amongst the Goths. Bolstered by the new arrivals they would have had the numerical strength to stand up to the local Roman officials. At the same time their numbers would have made it nearly impossible to find enough food in the over-foraged areas of the river crossing. Although not yet in open revolt, the Goths took matters into their own hands, defied local authority, and broke out of the containment area along the Danube to strike south for the low-lying fertile region near Marcianople (Devnja in modern Bulgaria).

The stage was set for conflict and it would only take a spark to set it off. That spark was a bungled assassination attempt on the Gothic leaders.

CHRONOLOGY

AD 284–305: Reign of Diocletian.

286–292: Diocletian completely reorganises the administration of the Empire, splitting it in two. The West and East are each ruled by an emperor or 'Augustus'.

295–297: War against Persia.

298: Gaul invaded by the Alamanni.

305: Diocletian and Maximian (his co-ruler of the western empire) abdicate. They are succeeded by Constantius in the west and Galerius in the east.

305–308: Disputes over the Imperial succession lead to strife and civil war.

311–312: Civil war between Maxentius and Constantine.

312: The Battle of Milvian Bridge. Constantine defeats Maxentius who drowns whilst trying to escape. In the aftermath Constantine disbands the Praetorian Guard and converts to Christianity. Constantine recognises Licinius as Augustus of the eastern Empire.

315: The Goths cross the Danube. Constantine drives them back across the Danube and then leads a punitive expedition into the old Roman province of Dacia.

323: In renewed civil war Constantine defeats Licinius, becoming sole Emperor. His latter years are dominated by the construction of a new capital – Constantinople. He reorganises the army creating elite, centrally located field forces and raising new, smaller more flexible units.

332: Constantine defeats Ariaricus, King of the Goths, who had crossed the Danube into Moesia. He imposes a treaty on the Goths giving them the status of a client state.

337–350: War with Persia.

350–351: Civil war between Constantius and the usurper Magnentius. Constantius is victorious.

355–358: Constantius campaigns along the Danube against the Quadi and Sarmatians.

356–359: Constantius' cousin Julian campaigns against the Alamanni and Franks in Gaul, repairing much of the damage caused by the barbarian incursions and restoring the frontier defences.

358–363: War with Persia is renewed.

360–361: Civil war between Julian and Constantius. Constantius dies leaving Julian as Emperor. Julian renounces Christianity, returning to Paganism.

363: Julian's campaign in Persia. He is mortally wounded during a Persian night attack on the Roman camp.

363–364: Julian's successor, Jovian, negotiates a disastrous peace with Persia. He dies en route to Constantinople in suspicious circumstances.

364: Valentinian becomes Emperor and immediately chooses his brother Valens as co-emperor in the east.

365–367: War against the Alamanni.

366: Rebellion of Procopius the eastern usurper is quickly crushed by Valens.

367–369: War with the Goths. Valens successfully campaigns across the Danube but the war ends in stalemate.

372–374: The Huns crush the kingdom of the Alans, sending the remnants fleeing westward.

373–377: Shapur of Persia declares war as a result of Valens' support of Armenia. Valens makes Antioch his base for the campaigns against the Persians.

374–375: Valentinian campaigns against the Quadi on the Danube.

375: Valentinian dies and is succeeded by his son Gratian.

376: The Huns invade the territory of the Goths. Defeated, the Goths stream west. Some seek sanctuary within the Empire.

The bungled assassination of Fritigern and Alatheus triggers the Gothic revolt.

Battle of Marcianople. The Goths defeat the forces in Thrace commanded by Lupicinus, *Comes* of Thrace.

377: Battle of Ad Salices. A force led by the western general Richomeres fights a bloody but indecisive battle against the Goths.

378: The western general Sebastian wages a successful hit-and-run campaign against the Goths with a hand-picked force.

9 August 378: The Battle of Adrianople. The Roman army is crushed and Valens killed.

379–395: Theodosius becomes Eastern Emperor and re-establishes control over the Balkans in a series of campaigns.

382: Treaty agreed between the Goths and Romans. The Goths are given land to settle in Moesia in return for providing troops for the East Roman Army.

394: The Battle of Frigidus. Theodosius defeats Arbogast with the help of the Goths. A large number of Goths are killed, fuelling resentment against the Empire.

395: The death of Theodosius triggers a series of barbarian risings including the Goths under Alaric.

402: Alaric invades Italy, and in 410 captures and sacks Rome itself.

406: Vandals, Alans and Suebi cross the Rhine.

411–418: The Goths move into Gaul and Spain, eventually establishing their own kingdom around Toulouse.

OPPOSING ARMIES

THE ROMAN ARMY

We have a fairly good idea of how the later Roman army was organised from the *Notitia Dignitatum* – a list of officials and military units from the end of the 4th century/early 5th. Although it dates from several years after Adrianople, it serves as a useful guide if not an exact order of battle for AD 378.

The Roman army had undergone significant organisational change over the years prior to Adrianople. It was no longer the offensive force it had been in the classical period but, on the other hand, it was better suited to deal with the pressures of constant incursions along the frontiers. By the mid-4th century the army was organised into two main categories of troops designed to provide defence in depth. Static garrison troops of reduced status (*limitanei*) manned the frontiers; and mobile field armies (*comitatenses*) of new, smaller and more flexible units were held in reserve ready to move rapidly to trouble spots.

Based in strongpoints throughout the frontier zones the *limitanei* provided immediate protection to the surrounding area and, in addition to being a deterrent, they carried out policing and internal security duties. There were a total of 30 commands of *limitanei* (called *ripenses* or *riparienses* along river frontiers) throughout the Empire, each usually commanded by an officer with the title of *dux*. These commands ranged from the Saxon Shore in Britain, to Syria in the east. The main commands along the Danube were (from west to east) Valeria; Pannonia II; Moesia I; Dacia Ripensis; Moesia II; and Scythia. Although all the Danubian commands would have been under pressure during the early stages of the campaign it was probably the *Dux Moesia Secunda* who was confronted with the immediate task of dealing with the Goths crossing the Danube in 376.

The *limitanei* were static troops who remained permanently at the same location with their families. Service was hereditary, and many soldiers had other occupations. If an enemy broke through the frontier defences the *limitanei* would hold their positions while the regional field army would move to deal with the incursion. These mobile armies were originally formed, partly by withdrawing some detachments from the old legions based along the frontier and partly by raising new units. Units descended from the old legions could still be identified by their numerical name, such as the *Quinta Macedonica*. Some new units, such as the *Ioviani* and *Herculiani* legions, were raised by Diocletian, but most were probably created by Constantine.

The *Notitia Dignitatum* lists many units of the same name serving in different parts of the Empire with the designation *seniores* or *iuniores* to distinguish them. For example the *Ioviani Seniores* is serving in the West,

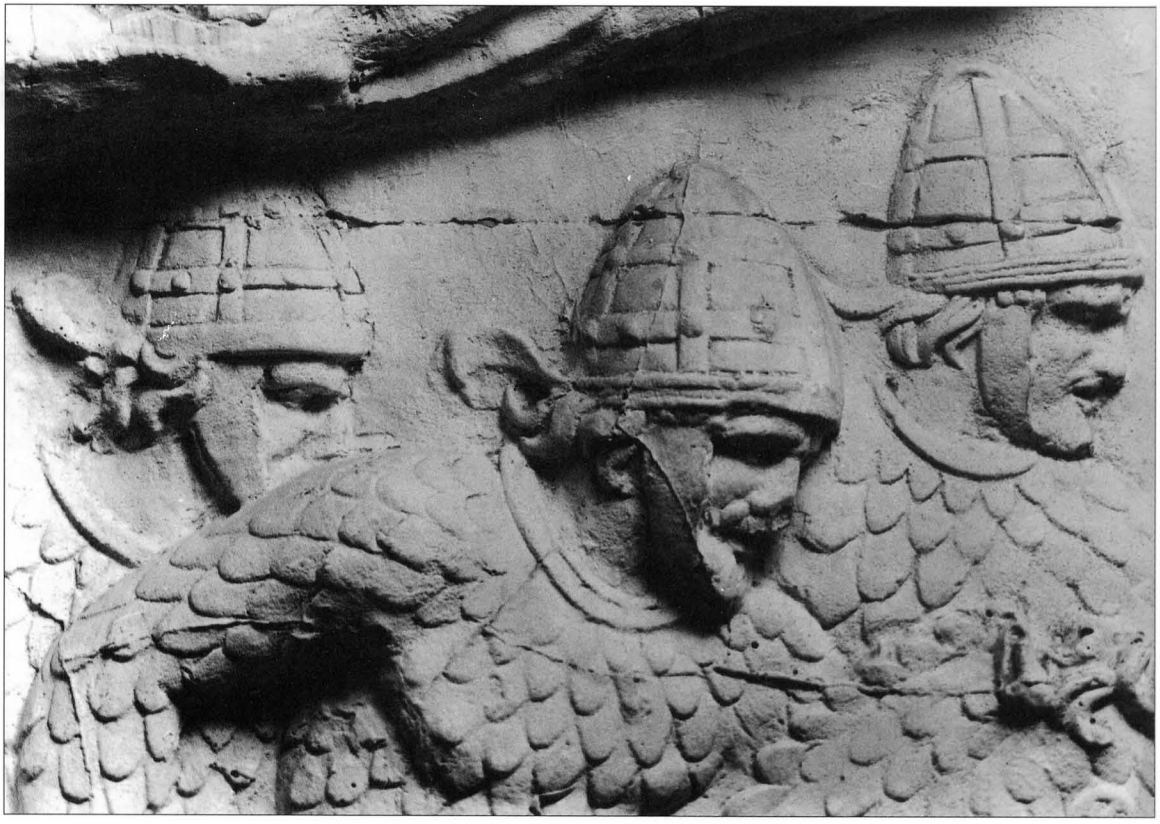
while the *Ioviani Iuniores* is in the East. It is possible that when the administration of the Empire was split between Valentinian and Valens, some units were likewise split with western units being designated *seniores* and eastern units *iuniores*. Such a split would most likely have involved recruiting a new unit under the old name rather than physically moving to the other side of the Empire. At least one unit of *iuniores* is recorded in existence in the 350s, before Valentinian and Valens split the Empire, so it is probable that this process took place over many years and could be likened to raising a new battalion of a modern regiment.

OPPOSITE, TOP **Flavius Maximianus, a mid-4th century Roman soldier, probably from a unit of the *auxilia palatina*. His shield pattern does not exactly match any shown in the *Notitia Dignitatum* but it is similar to those shown for the *Cornuti Seniores* and the *Marcomanni Seniores* and may show earlier variations. (Villa Maria Catacomb, Syracuse)**

BELOW **Sarmatian cavalry from Trajan's Column. Sarmatians, were a constant threat along the middle Danube. Although from an earlier period, their equipment of scale armour and spangenhelm helmets remained typical for the trans-Danubian tribes. They were related to the Alans. (Deutchen Archaologischen Instituts)**

The Mobile Field Armies

Because they were essentially mobile forces, the field armies had no fixed bases and their composition might change to meet a particular threat. For example Gratian dispatched several units from the western armies to aid Valens in the east. Therefore, the number of separate commands and their composition might change quite radically over a fairly short period of time. Normally each emperor had a main army which he commanded in person, assisted by a *magister militum* (master of soldiers), *magister equitum* (master of cavalry) and a *magister peditum* (master of infantry). This main army was known as the praesental army (*praesentalis*), or 'Army in the Emperor's Presence'. The units forming the praesental army were designated as *palatini* and enjoyed higher status than the *comitatenses* of the regional field armies. However, as units were posted from army to army or were sent as reinforcements units of



comitatenses and *palatini* found themselves serving in the same armies, although the *palatini* continued to enjoy higher status and were mainly concentrated in the praesental armies.

The smaller regional field armies of *comitatenses* were usually commanded by a *comes* (count) but in some cases command was given to a *magister equitum* or *magister peditum* (who despite their names could command both arms). For example, Lupicinus, described by Ammianus as '*comes per Thracias*' or Count of Thrace, initially commanded the regional army in Thrace in 376. As the crisis escalated, however, more senior ranking officers were sent in to take command: first Trajan (*magister peditum*) and then Saturninus on temporary promotion to *magister equitum*.

By the beginning of the 5th century the *Notitia Dignitatum* records twelve field armies in existence. In the east, the praesental army, which was based near Constantinople, had been split into two forces, each of 12 cavalry and 24 infantry units. In addition there were three regional armies, one each based in Thrace (seven cavalry and 21 infantry units), Illyricum (two cavalry and 24 infantry units), and the east (Orientum – 10 cavalry and 21 infantry units). In the west there were again two main armies, one in Gaul (12 cavalry and 35 infantry units), and one in Italy (seven cavalry and 28 infantry units). Regional armies included Britain (six cavalry and three infantry), western Illyricum (22 infantry only), Spain (16 infantry only), Tangiers (three cavalry and four infantry) and Africa (19 cavalry only).

We cannot know for certain how similar this was to the field army organisation of the 370s. Many of the units listed in the *Notitia* were created after Adrianople and many had been transferred from the *limitanei* (and given the classification of *pseudocomitatenses*) possibly in the crisis after the battle. We know that in 376 Gratian and Valens were each commanding a praesental army in Gaul and Syria respectively and that regional forces were operating in Thrace (under Count Lupicinus) and Illyricum (under Count Frigeridus). Various temporary groupings of units came together at different times in the campaign but since very few units are named it is impossible to know the degree of difference between the organisations of 378 and that listed in the *Notitia*.

The organisation described in the *Notitia* for the western army probably reflects the centralisation of power in the hands of Stilicho in the early 5th century and it is quite likely that the western regional field armies described for Spain and Illyricum post-date Adrianople. In the east the *Notitia* reflects Theodosius' organisation at around AD 395 and, apart from several newly recruited units, may not have been significantly different to the forces at Valens' disposal.

In addition to the *comitatenses* and *palatini*, the emperors were also served by a number of guards units known collectively as the *scholae*. These units had replaced the Praetorian Guard (disbanded by Constantine after the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312) and were all cavalry. The *Notitia* lists five units in the west, each probably of 500 men, and

BELOW **The Insignia of the *Magister Militum Praesentalis*, Commander of the main East Roman Field Army: the army 'in the emperor's presence.' The shield patterns shown are those of the senior East Roman palatine units: *Lanciarii Seniores*, *Ioviani Iuniores*, *Herculiani Iuniores*, *Fortenses*, *Nervii*, *Matiarii Iuniores*, *Batavi Iuniores* and *Brachiati Iunories*. Most or all of these units fought at Adrianople. The *Lanciarii*, *Matiarii* and *Batavi* certainly did. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)**

another seven units in the east. These units were crack combat troops not ceremonial guards. Their reputation was such that Ammianus records an incident when the enemy were encouraged to attack having noticed units of the *schola* were absent from the Roman order of battle.

Roman Cavalry

There had been a steady increase in the numbers of cavalry in the army since the mid-3rd century when Gallienus (253–68) created a mobile cavalry reserve. This was due more to strategic than tactical reasons. Mounted troops could not ride down steady infantry on the battlefield but they could get to a trouble spot more quickly and could successfully engage disordered bands of raiders. By the time of Adrianople, the main field armies in the east were probably composed of about one quarter cavalry, with the regional field armies in the mountainous areas of Thrace and Illyricum containing considerably less. In the *Notitia*, for example, the praesental armies are 29 percent cavalry while the army of Thrace is 14 percent cavalry. The *limitanei*, however, had an even higher proportion of cavalry, reflecting the need for mobility to patrol their areas of responsibility and act as an internal security force. Their main job was to chase down small groups of bandits and raiders, rather than stand firm in line of battle. Along the Danube the proportions of cavalry in the frontier forces ranged from 32 percent available to the *Dux Moesia Prima*, to 59 percent under the *Dux Valeria*.

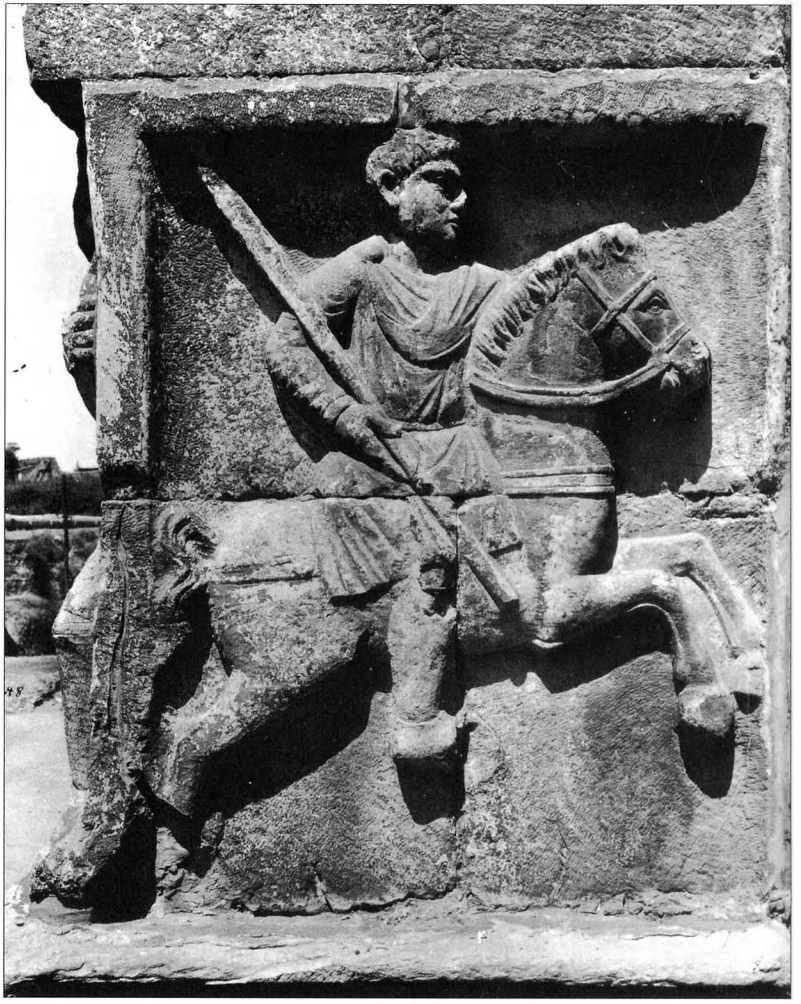
Roman *clibanarii* were probably modelled on heavily armoured Persian cavalry such as the man pictured in this crude 3rd century graffito from Dura Europos. (Yale University Art Gallery)

Cavalry in the field armies was organised into units known as *vexillationes*. There is no conclusive evidence for the size of a *vexillatio* but it was likely around 200–400 men strong, with 500 perhaps being the full 'paper strength' and 300 the norm. Some cavalry units in the *limitanei* were also called *vexillationes* but others retained the old titles of *alae* or *cunei*, which had been the names of auxiliary cavalry units dating back many years (*ala* in fact going back to Republican times when allies provided the bulk of the cavalry). The name variation probably reflected their history rather than an organisational or tactical difference. Again there is no hard evidence for the size of these units. They may also have had a paper strength of 500 but in reality they were very much smaller. Several third century cavalry *alae*, for example, are recorded as having barely over 100 men.

The 4th century Roman army contained essentially three broad categories of cavalry: light skirmishers, conventional heavy cavalry, and heavily armoured cataphracts. The light cavalry consisted of *equites sagittarii* (horse archers) and light javelin armed cavalry such as *equites mauri* (Moors), *dalmatae* (from Dalmatia) and *cetrati* (named after a type of small light shield). However they were armed, their role was essentially the same. They scouted in front of the army and skirmished with the enemy at a distance. They relied on a combination of missile weapons and speed to inflict damage and keep out of the way of troops better equipped in hand-to-hand combat. *Sagittarii* were the largest group of light cavalry, constituting 15 percent of the eastern *comitatenses* at the time of the *Notitia*. Bows would have been a more effective weapon than javelins for light skirmishers, because of greater range and the ability to carry more ammunition. Some troops (such as Moors and Dalmatians) may have been armed with javelins rather than bows because of a native ability with them. Others, especially *limitanei*, may have been javelin-armed because it was easier to train a javelinman than an archer. With speed as their best protection, light cavalry would deploy in loose formations and probably did not bother wearing any armour. They may, however, have carried small, light shields.

At the other extreme were the cataphracts. These were exceptionally heavily armoured cavalry, often (but not always) riding armoured horses. Most would have been lance-armed shock cavalry but some units, such as the *Equites Sagittarii Clibanarii*, copied the Persians and were armoured horse archers. Cataphract cavalry included units called *catafractarii* and others called *clibanarii*. On one occasion Ammianus describes heavily armoured lancers as '*catafractari equites (quos clibanarios dictitant)*' – cataphract cavalry (which they call *clibanarii*). As with the terms *vexillatio* and *ala*, these names probably indicated the unit's origin rather than a particular fighting style, with units of *catafractarii* being modelled originally on the Sarmatians and *clibanarii* copied from the Persians. It is also possible that some units called *armigeri* were also exceptionally heavily armoured. There is no mention of any cataphracts fighting at Adrianople but since all of the main eastern armies listed in the *Notitia* contained a fairly high proportion of cataphracts (25 percent in praesental armies), it is probable that some were present even if they did not distinguish themselves.

The majority of cavalry, however, had changed little over the centuries. Units of *comites*, *promoti*, *scutarii* and *stablesiani* were probably



An unarmoured cavalryman from the Arch of Constantine. From the 3rd century artists frequently portrayed soldiers without armour, in the same way as a modern soldier might be depicted without a flak jacket and helmet. This has led some historians to conclude that most late Roman soldiers never wore armour. However, although there were specialist light troops, and some soldiers might not wear armour on special operations, the vast majority of cavalry and infantry wore mail or scale armour in formal battle. (Deutchen Archaologischen Instituts)

very similar to the auxiliary cavalry of classical times. They would have worn a helmet, some form of body armour (usually mail, but sometimes scale or lamellar) and carried a substantial shield, a spear and several javelins. Their normal tactic would have been to skirmish with the enemy, trying to wear him down or get around his flanks, then charge home when the opportunity presented itself.

Roman Infantry

Although cavalry had increased in numbers and importance, when it came to pitched battle it was still down to the infantry. The cavalry scouted in front, protected the flanks and harassed the enemy, but it was the infantry who would win or lose the day.

There were two main categories of infantry in the field armies: legions and *auxilia*. The 4th century legions were much smaller than the classical legions, probably no more than 1,000 men at full strength, although larger old-style legions divided into several cohorts still existed in the frontier armies. These cohorts were technically about 500 men strong but one 3rd century source records a cohort of an Egyptian legion

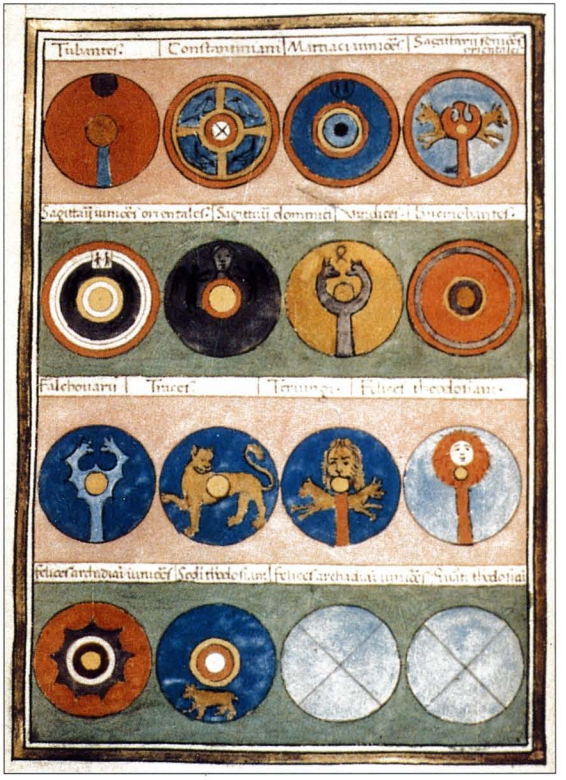
with an actual strength of only 164 men. Some frontier garrisons no longer had unit titles and were simply called *milites* (soldiers).

The bulk of the infantry in the main field armies were *auxilia palatina*. These were new units, the first of which were raised by Constantine, and they were probably 500 men strong at full strength with 300–400 men the normal campaign strength. The 5th century writer Flavius Vegetius Renatus says that the legions were more heavily armoured and more strictly disciplined than the *auxilia*. However, Ammianus' battle descriptions show that the *auxilia* were exceptionally tough, flexible troops, although inclined to get into trouble with the local population when not in action.

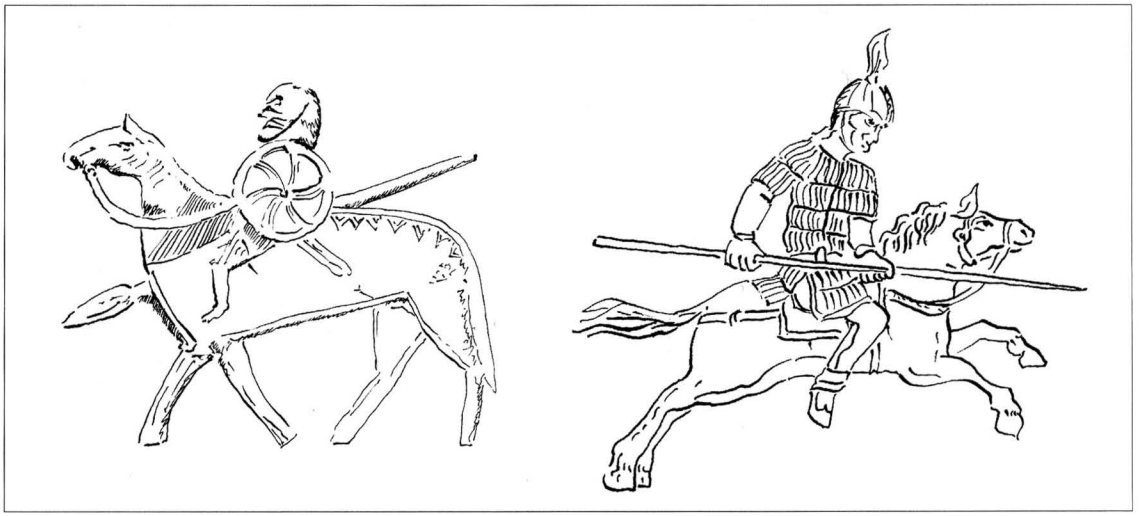
Both legions and *auxilia* usually fought as heavy infantry in close order, with the intention of defeating the enemy in hand-to-hand combat. However, the *auxilia* may have been more flexible, capable of carrying out special skirmish operations as well as fighting in the main line of battle. Most *auxilia* and some legions were brigaded in pairs. These groupings were apparently permanent with paired units having similar shield patterns and forming up together on the battlefield.

The amount of armour worn by late Roman infantry has been a matter of much debate amongst modern historians, some claiming that from the 3rd century, metal body armour had been abandoned. This has come about because in the 3rd century there was an artistic convention that displayed soldiers on tombstones without armour and furthermore in the 5th century Vegetius wrote: 'Although we have made some improvements in the arms of the cavalry, following the example of the Goths, the Alans and the Huns, it is plain the infantry are entirely defenceless. From the foundation of the city until the reign of Gratian, the foot wore cuirasses and helmets. But negligence and sloth having by degrees introduced a total relaxation of discipline, the soldiers began to consider their armour too heavy and seldom put it on. They first requested leave from the Emperor to lay aside the cuirass and afterwards the helmet. In consequence of this our troops in their engagements with the Goths were often overwhelmed with showers of arrows.'

Other evidence, both pictorial and literary, clearly shows armour was generally worn by most if not all infantry in the 3rd–5th centuries. It is possible that armour was in short supply in the immediate aftermath of Adrianope and the years of confusion that followed. It is also possible that the many units transferred from the *limitanei* to the *comitatenses* after Adrianople did not have body armour. This would explain why Vegetius says that unarmoured infantry became the norm after the reign of Gratian. At Adrianople, however, both legions and *auxilia* were probably armoured. Towards the end of the battle Ammianus, for example, refers to the infantry as being 'weighed down by the burden of their armour.' Armour



The shield patterns of *auxilia palatina* serving in the second praesental army. The last five units were raised after Adrianople and the *Tervingi* (third row, third shield) were probably recruited from Fritigern's followers. Units of Tervingi warriors were serving in the Roman army prior to Adrianople and they may have carried similarly painted shields. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)



There are no contemporary illustrations of Goths of the period. The first figure depicts a migration period Thuringian while the second shows a well-equipped Goth, Lombard or Gepid in the 6th century East Roman army. (Drawn by Peter Sautter)

would be mail, scale or solid cuirasses moulded to depict a muscular torso. Mail was usually iron but scale armour was often bronze. Muscled cuirasses (usually only worn by officers) could be either bronze or iron. The well-known segmented armour (*lorica segmentata*) had dropped out of use by the end of the 3rd century.

The heavy infantry of the 4th century carried large oval or round shields and were usually armed with a sword (*spatha*), spear (*lancea*), javelins (*verutae*) and darts (*mattiobarbuli* or *plumbatae*). Some carried a small axe (*securis*) as a hand arm instead of a sword. The heavy javelin (*pilum*) of the classical period had dropped out of use. The infantry were usually employed defensively, forming a line 6–8 men deep that met an enemy charge with a shower of javelins and darts, then a wall of shields and spear-points.

There were some specialised light infantry formations. These included several units of *sagittarii* (archers) *exculcatores* (probably light javelinmen), *funditores* (slingers) and *balistarii* (crossbowmen). When more skirmishers were required, these were usually found by selecting a number of active men from each unit. Such men, drawn from several units, were brigaded together like 18th century light companies, and sent on special operations, probably without armour and equipped with javelins, darts and shields.

Tactics

Although the organisation of the Roman army had changed considerably over the hundred years before Adrianople, tactics had not. Essentially the Roman army still formed up with infantry in the centre and cavalry on the wings. Skirmishers were usually deployed in front of the battle line and fell back in the face of an enemy advance to take up a position behind the heavy infantry. Usually the infantry was formed in two lines, probably with most *auxilia* in the first line and legions in the second. This basic formation would have been recognised by Hadrian, Augustus or even Scipio.

The best description of a 4th century battle is Ammianus' account of the Battle of Strasbourg in 357. He mentions the *Cornuti* and *Brachiati*

(both *auxilia palatina*) in the front line while in a rear line he mentions the *Batavi* (*auxilium palatinum*), *Regii* (there was both a *legio comitatenses* and an *auxilia palatina* of the same name) and *Primani* (a legion). Interestingly, the *Batavi* were again deployed as part of the reserve at the battle of Adrianople.

Archers usually were deployed behind the heavy infantry and shot over their heads although they might open the battle as a screen in front of the heavy troops. Light cavalry might open the battle in advance of the army (as was the case at Adrianople) and then move out to the extremity of the wings where they could try to outflank the enemy. Conventional cavalry and cataphracts would be on the immediate wings of the infantry and try to break the enemy cavalry then fall in on the flanks of their infantry. Since men on horses could not hope to break a steady line of infantry from the front, cavalry would not attempt to engage infantry unless they were able to hit them in the flank or rear, or when they were disordered. If they managed to find such an opportunity, as the Gothic cavalry did at Adrianople, individual men on foot without the benefit of unit cohesion, would be easily ridden down by mounted soldiers.

According to Vegetius: 'The post of the commander-in-chief is generally on the right between the cavalry and infantry. For from this place he can best direct the motions of the whole army...it is also the most convenient spot from which to issue orders to both horse and foot and to animate them equally by his presence. It is his duty to surround the enemy's left wing opposed to him with his reserve of cavalry and light infantry, and attack it in the flank and rear. The second in command is posted in the centre of the infantry to encourage and support them. A reserve of good and well armed infantry is near him and under his orders ... The post of the third in command is on the left. He should be a careful and intrepid officer, this part of the army being difficult to manage and vulnerable, as it were, from its situation in the line. He should, therefore, have a reserve of good cavalry and active infantry to enable him to extend his left in such a manner as to prevent it being surrounded.'

The right wing of an ancient army was traditionally the strongest. This was because when moving into contact a foot soldier would naturally drift to the right to seek protection of his neighbour's shield. Also, any cavalry on the right would feel more secure moving around the flank of enemy to their left since they would be keeping their shield towards the enemy. It was easier, therefore, to try to attempt a right flanking and as a result the best troops were usually stationed on the right wing, while the left wing had to be reinforced to prevent envelopment by the enemy. This has passed down into modern times with the honour of forming 'right of the line' on parade going to the most senior unit.

THE ROMAN ORDER OF BATTLE

We have only a vague idea of the units which fought at Adrianople. Ammianus mentions a handful by name and although it is possible to make some educated guesses, extrapolating backwards from the *Notitia Dignitatum*, any attempt at recreating Valens' army of 378 must be speculative.

The *Notitia Dignitatum* shows that in Theodosius' order of battle at around 395, he had split the Army in the Emperor's Presence in two

equal forces of 21,000 men at full strength. This split may have occurred when Valens marched west with a portion of the army, leaving the rest to guard against any incursion by the Persians on the eastern frontier. Since Valens had about 15,000 men with him, and many units would have been well below full strength, the 21,000-strong praesental army of 395 serves as a useful guide of a likely, if not exact, composition of the East Roman army at Adrianople.

A possible composition of the Roman army at Adrianople may have been: 1,500 *Scholae*, 1,000 *Equites Palatinae*, 1,500 *Equites Comitatenses*, 5,000 *Legiones Palatinae*, 6,000 *Auxilia Palatinae*.

A more detailed list of units taken from the *Notitia* is listed below. The First Army in the Emperor's Presence is given in full detail as it is probably this force which bears the closest resemblance to the army commanded by Valens at Adrianople. Those units listed in bold are those which almost certainly fought at Adrianople. Other units listed (except those in italics) may well have formed part of Valens' army. Those units listed in italics were almost certainly not present at the battle.

This hunter from a floor mosaic in the Imperial Palace in Constantinople is in the typical fighting position of the period. He holds his shield with a central hand-grip and uses his light spear (*lancea*) overhand. The spear would often be thrown just before contact after which he would draw his sword. (Mosaic Museum, Istanbul)

The Eastern *Scholae*

With the Emperor himself present it is likely that at least half of these units were present at Adrianople, possibly more. (Full strength 500 men, probable campaign strength 400 men).

Scutarii Prima (Heavy cavalry) – This and the Scutarii Secunda may have been the Scutarii that opened the battle.

Scutarii Secunda (Heavy cavalry) – It is quite possible that there were several units of Scutarii present at Adrianople.

Gentiles Seniores (Heavy cavalry) – Originally recruited from foreigners, probably Germans.

Scutarii Sagittarii (Horse archers, possibly armoured) – This unit may have been the archers mentioned as fighting alongside the Scutarii.

Scutarii Clibanarii (Heavily armoured cataphracts)

Armaturae Iuniores (Heavily armoured cavalry)

Gentiles Iuniores (Heavy cavalry)

The First Army in the Emperor's Presence (Praesentalis I), AD 395

Elite Cavalry Units – *Vexillationes Palatinae*.
(Full strength 500 men, probable campaign strength 300 men.)

Equites Promoti Seniores (Conventional heavy cavalry) – Potentius, tribune of the Promoti, was killed in the battle.

Comites Clibanarii (Heavily armoured cataphracts)

Comites Sagittarii Iuniores (Light horse-archers) – At least one unit of horse archers was part of the right-wing cavalry, others may have been present.

Comites Taifali (Conventional heavy cavalry) – Probably recruited after AD 377 from Taifali prisoners.

Comites Arcades (Conventional heavy cavalry) – Raised after Adrianople.

Line Cavalry Units – *Vexillationes Comitatenses.*
(Full strength 500 men, probable campaign strength 200–300 men.)

Equites Catafractarii Biturigenses (Heavily armoured lancers)
Equites Armigeri Seniores Gallicani (Heavily armoured cavalry)
Equites Quinto Dalmatae (Light javelin cavalry)
Equites Nono Dalmatae (Light javelin cavalry)
Equites Primi Scutarii (Conventional heavy cavalry) – At least one unit of Scutarii was definitely present, but it is not clear if it was *comitatenses* or *scholae*.
Equites Promoti Iuniores (Conventional heavy cavalry) – Potentius, tribune of the Promoti, was killed in the battle.
Equites Primi Clibanarii Parthi (Heavily armoured cataphracts)

Legiones Palatinae
(Full strength 1,000 men, probable campaign strength 800 men.)

Lanciarii Seniores (Heavy infantry) – The most senior legion of the entire army. Made a last stand at Adrianople.
Ioviani Iuniores (Heavy infantry)
Herculiani Iuniores (Heavy infantry)
Fortenses (Heavy infantry)
Nervii (Heavy infantry)
Matiarii Iuniores (Heavy infantry) – Joined the Lanciarii in their last stand.

Auxilia Palatina
(Full strength 500 men, probable campaign strength 300–400 men.)

Batavi Seniores (Heavy infantry) – Held in reserve at Adrianople.
Brachiati Seniores (Heavy infantry)
Salii (Heavy infantry)
Constantiani (Heavy infantry)
Mattiaci Seniores (Heavy infantry)
Sagittarii Seniores Gallicani (Foot archers) – Several units of foot archers were definitely present at Adrianople.
Sagittarii Iuniores Gallicani (Foot archers)
Tertii Sagittarii Valentis (Foot archers) – Unit probably raised by Valens.
Defensores (Heavy infantry)
Raetobarii (Heavy infantry)
Anglevarii (Heavy infantry)
Hiberi (Heavy infantry)
Visi (Heavy infantry) – Probably recruited from Goths after the treaty of 382.
Victores (Heavy infantry) – Raised after Adrianople.
Primi Theodosiani (Heavy infantry) – Raised after Adrianople.
Tertii Theodosiani (Heavy infantry) – Raised after Adrianople.
Felices Theodosiani (Heavy infantry) – Raised after Adrianople.

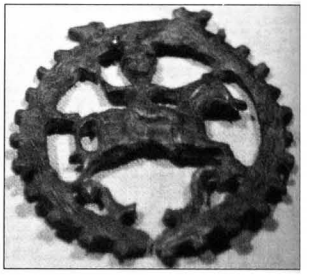
The Second Army in the Emperor's Presence (Praesentalis II), AD 395

6 Vexillationes Palatinae – Included one unit of horse archers and one of Clibanarii. One of the four conventional units was raised after Adrianople.
6 Vexillationes Comitatenses – Included three cataphract units, two *scutarii* and one light javelinmen (*dalmatae*).
6 Legiones Palatinae – Included the *Matiarii Seniores* and *Lanciarii Iuniores*. Since Ammianus only mentions '*Lanciarii* and *Matiarii*' it is impossible to know whether

it was these units or their counterparts listed in the First Army who were at Adrianople, or whether they had been split into *iuniores* and *seniores* after 378.

16 Auxilia Palatina – Three of which were archers. Five of the non-archer units were probably raised after Adrianople. The **Cornuti**, which was badly mauled at Dibaltum, is listed in this army. The survivors of Dibaltum may have fought at Adrianople.

1 Pseudocomitatus – Archers promoted from the *limitanei* after Adrianople.



This 6th century Visigothic horse pendant shows the typical mounted warrior that became the mainstay of Gothic and Roman armies in the years after Adrianople. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

Regional Field Army of Oriens (based in Syria)

The predecessors of this army almost certainly remained in the east throughout the Adrianople campaign.

10 Vexillationes Comitatenses.

9 Legiones Comitatenses – One raised after Adrianople.

2 Auxilia Palatina – Both raised after Adrianople.

10 Pseudocomitatenses – Two of which were probably raised after Adrianople.

Regional Field Army of Thrace

This army, charged with the defence of Thrace, bore the brunt of the campaign in 376–377. Its units would have been severely depleted by 378 and probably very few if any took part in the battle.

3 Vexillationes Palatinae – All raised after Adrianople.

7 Vexillationes Comitatenses – One of which was raised after Adrianople.

21 Legiones Comitatenses – Three of which were probably raised by Valens.

Regional Field Army of Illyricum

This army was probably created in the aftermath of Adrianople, possibly at the time of Alaric's revolt (AD 395). It has the look of a hastily gathered force with a large number of *pseudocomitatenses* drawn from the frontier to deal with an emergency. It is possible that some of the palatine units were brought from the west by Frigeridus and Richomeres to fight in the campaign of 377 and that they remained in Illyricum.

2 Vexillationes Comitatenses

1 Legio Palatina, the *Britones Seniores*

8 Legiones Comitatenses

6 Auxilia Palatina, including one unit of archers. Also included were the *Petulantes Iuniores*, the junior 'battalion' of the *Petulantes Seniores* who fought the Alamanni on the Rhine frontier in 377.

9 Pseudocomitatenses, all of which were probably raised after Adrianople.

The *Limitanei*

The size of units in the *limitanei* are harder to estimate than those of the field army. Old style legions dating back several centuries were frequently split up into multiple detachments of a few hundred men each. Listing the provinces from east to west the following *limitanei* defended the Danube frontier:

Scythia: 7 *cunei equitum*; 2 legions: *I Iovia* and *II Herculia* each split in 3 detachments; 8 auxilia; 1 river flotilla.

Moesia II: 7 *cunei equitum*; 2 legions: *I Italica* and *XI Claudia* each split in 2 detachments; 10 *auxilia*; 3 additional cohorts; 1 river flotilla.

Moesia I: 8 *cunei equitum*; 8 *auxilia*; 2 legions: *IV Flavia* and 2 detachments of *VII Claudia*; 5 *milites*; 2 flotillas.

Dacia Ripenses: 9 *cunei equitum*; 6 *auxilia*; 2 legions: *V Macedonica* in 4 detachments and *XIII Gemina* in 5 detachments; 2 additional cohorts; 1 *milites*; 2 flotillas

Pannonia II: 6 *cunei equitum*; 11 *vexillationes*; 5 *auxilia*; 2 legions: *V Iovia* and *VI Herculia* in 3 detachments each; 5 flotillas; 1 *ala*; 4 additional cohorts; 1 *milites*.

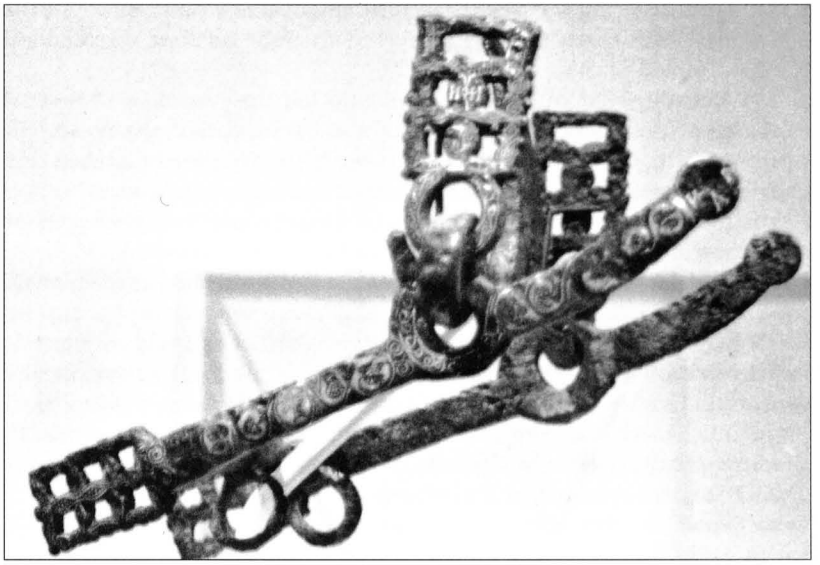
Valeria: 5 *cunei equitum*; 17 *vexillationes*; 5 *auxilia*; 2 legions: *I Adiutrix* and 6 detachments of *II Adiutrix*; 1 flotilla; 6 additional cohorts.

THE GOTHIC ARMY

Compared to the large amount of information available on the Roman army of the 4th century, we know virtually nothing concrete about the Gothic forces. The Goths were a whole people on the move, rather than an organised army. They fought with whatever weapons they were able to capture and welcomed into their ranks men of any nationality who were willing to fight. The army that fought at Adrianople was unlike any Gothic army the Romans had fought before. At its core were the Tervingi, the Gothic clan which had previously lived north-east of the Danube, but it also included some Greuthungi from further east, nomadic Huns and Alans, Gothic units from the Roman army, escaped Roman slaves, prisoners of war, deserters and a large number of gold miners trying to 'escape the heavy burden of taxation.'

Tervingi and Greuthungi

Most modern historians incorrectly call the Tervingi 'Visigoths' and the Greuthungi 'Ostrogoths', equating these 4th century clans with the later 5th–6th century kingdoms. The Visigoths, who established a kingdom in France in 418, were in fact descended from all of the people who



An elaborate Visigothic horse bit. The various people who crossed the Danube in 376–377 eventually coalesced into the Visigoths and founded a kingdom in southern France in AD 418, later moving into Spain. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

followed Fritigern (including Tervingi, Greuthungi and non-Goths), augmented by the followers of Radagaisus who invaded Italy in 405. The Ostrogoths are mentioned by the poet Claudian in 399 as separate from the Greuthungi and may have been another clan which grew in power during the 5th century beyond the Roman frontier. Probably those people who formed the Ostrogothic Kingdom in Italy at the end of the 5th century were a similar mixture of clans, no doubt including some Greuthungi, but not exclusively.

When the Tervingi crossed the Danube in 376 they were expected to give up their arms as a condition of entry into Roman territory. Although it is unclear how well they fulfilled this requirement, it is probable that they were not able to bring much military equipment over the Danube with them. Virtually all their weaponry therefore, came from Roman sources. Ammianus is quite specific about this on several occasions. After they defeated Lupicinus, for example, the Goths 'armed themselves with Roman weapons.' When Sueridas and Colias rebelled they gained access to the Roman arms factory at Adrianople and again Ammianus says they equipped themselves 'with Roman arms.' By the time of Adrianople, therefore, most of the Goths would have been completely equipped in Roman clothing and accoutrements and carrying Roman weapons.

Typical of most Germanic warriors of this period, the Goths did not have clear divisions of cavalry and infantry. A warrior was a warrior, who might fight mounted or dismounted depending on the situation. It is unlikely that many horses could have been ferried across the Danube and any that did, probably ended up as food in the early days. After conflict broke out, horses would have been captured and as many men as possible would have been mounted, but primarily for strategic mobility rather than tactical advantage. As late as the 6th century, Ostrogoths were fighting on foot when in rough terrain or in defensive circumstances. It is probable, therefore, that those who had horses would have fought mounted when fighting in open terrain, or against small groups of disordered opponents, or to exploit a sudden advantage like the mounted charge by the Greuthungi at Adrianople. But on most occasions Goths seem to have preferred to fight on foot, particularly when on the defensive.

It is possible that the Greuthungi, who led the mounted charge at Adrianople, were more inclined than the Tervingi to fight mounted. They had only just moved off the steppes of the southern Ukraine and had longer contact with the Huns, Alans and other mounted steppe nomads. Since they crossed the Danube illegally and had not endured the same starvation conditions as the Tervingi, it is also possible that they would have been able to bring over and retain more horses than their cousins.

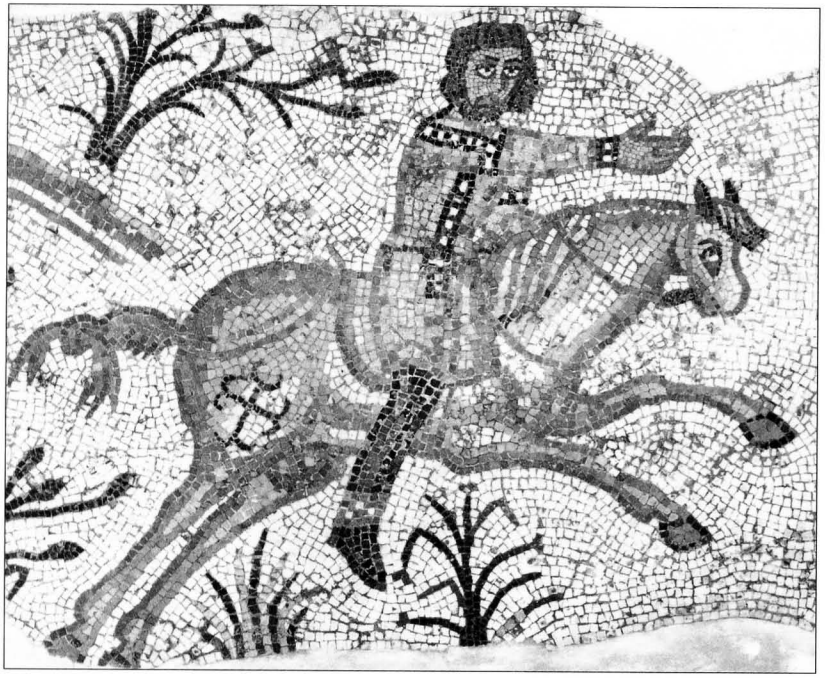
Unlike many western Germanic peoples, the Goths apparently made a fairly wide use of missile weapons. Vegetius (quoted above) specifically mentions Gothic archery as a problem for Roman troops and Ammianus' battle descriptions continually refer to the use of missile weapons by the Goths, including javelins, slings and bows. It seems implicit in these accounts that warriors armed with missile weapons formed part of the main body of troops rather than being a distinct group of light infantry skirmishers. In fact Ammianus' account of the Battle of Ad Salices in 377 probably gives the best description of how the Goths normally fought: 'After an exchange of javelins and other missiles at long range, the opposing sides clashed and fought foot to foot with their shields locked.'

The shield-like designs on the shirts of these men from a 5th century mosaic are thought to identify them as members of the *scholae*, possibly *scutarii*. (Mosaic Museum, Istanbul)

Other Troops

The Germanic Taifali joined a group of Greuthungi under Farnobius in 377 and fought together with them in Illyricum, although there is no indication any were present later at Adrianople. There is virtually no military information about the Taifali and we do not know how many of them there were or how, if at all, they differed from the Greuthungi. Ammianus tells us that the *limitanei* of the middle Danube had 'scattered in fear' of these 'unknown tribes', implying a fierce reputation. He claims that 'the Taifali are so sunk in gross sensuality that among them boys couple with men in a union of unnatural lust … but if a young man catches a boar single-handed, or kills a huge bear, he is exempt thereafter from the continuation of this lewd intercourse.'

Fritigern's followers included a fairly large number of Romans as well as Goths. These ranged from escaped slaves and gold miners, to Gothic units in the Roman army who, although initially loyal to Rome, were forced into rebellion by the hostility of the local populace. Although we



This 6th century mosaic from Carthage probably depicts an Alan. The large brand on the horse's flank is typical of the steppe nomads such as the Huns and Alans. (British Museum, London)

have no information about how many of these men joined Fritigern, they were clearly significant. The Goths in Roman service followed two leaders: Sueridas and Colias which might indicate two *auxilia* brigaded together in standard Roman practice. If so, there may have been anywhere from 600 to 1,000 men in total. Probably these men would have formed a distinct contingent, but the other individual Romans who joined the Goths were more likely to have attached themselves to the followings of various Gothic leaders and would have lost any separate identity.

There was also a contingent of Huns and Alans which joined the Goths in 377 and fought together with the Greuthungi at Adrianople. Again, although we do not know how many there were – their contribution was significant enough to swing the balance in the campaign of 377 in the Goths' favour. These men only crossed the Danube in 377 and did so under an agreement of alliance with the Goths. Although these men fought alongside the main group of Goths at Adrianople, the Western Emperor Gratian was ambushed by a separate band of Alans along the Danube as he was marching to join forces with Valens, just prior to the battle. Clearly, therefore, there was more than one group operating in Roman territory.

The Huns and Alans at Adrianople probably formed a separate contingent and fought in their traditional style as light mounted archers. Although they operated together and fought in very similar ways, they were quite distinctly different races. The Huns were a Turkic people from Central Asia, described by Ammianus as having 'squat bodies, strong limbs and thick necks.' The Alans were an Aryan/Iranian people, related to the Sarmatians and described as 'tall, handsome, with yellowish hair and frighteningly fierce eyes.'

Ammianus says of the Huns that they 'are ill-fitted to fight on foot, and remain glued to their horses ... When they join battle they advance

in packs, uttering their various war-cries. Being lightly equipped and very sudden in their movements they can deliberately scatter and gallop about at random ... They shoot from a distance arrows tipped with sharp splinters of bone ... At close quarters they fight without regard for their lives and while their opponents are guarding against sword-thrusts they catch their limbs in lassos of twisted cloth.' Ammianus does not go into as much detail describing how the Alans fought, but does say that they too lived a nomadic life and were 'active and nimble in the use of their arms and in every way a match for the Huns.' Since the Huns and Alans were relative late comers, joining the Goths in 377, they probably had access to less Roman equipment. Probably, however, the bone-tipped arrows were quickly replaced and no doubt replacement horses would have been rounded up from the countryside.

THE GOTHIC ORDER OF BATTLE

An estimate of the Gothic order of battle is inevitably even more speculative than the Romans as we have virtually no specific detail. The following breakdown is, therefore, one possible organisation based on Ammianus and the likely composition of Fritigern's forces.

Tervingi

Fritigern's Comitatus – about 1,000 men (Heavy cavalry) – Fritigern's close personal followers. Probably fought dismounted.

Sueridus' Unit – 300–400 men (Heavy infantry) – Ex-Roman soldiers.

Colias' Unit – 300–400 men (Heavy infantry) – Ex-Roman soldiers.

Spearmen – 6,000–8,000 men (Heavy infantry) – A mix of Goths, Romans and others. Probably formed in rough units of 500–1,000 men each. Some may have had horses but all probably fought on foot.

Foot Archers – 1,000–2,000 men (Light infantry) – Probably formed up behind the spearmen.

Greuthungi

Alatheus' Comitatus – about 500 men (Heavy cavalry)

Saphrax's Comitatus – about 500 men (Heavy cavalry) – Some may have been Alans armed with lances or bows.

Greuthungi Warriors – 2,000–3,000 men (Heavy cavalry) – Probably in units of about 500.

Alan Warriors – 1,000–2,000 men (Light cavalry) – Horse archers.

Hun Warriors – about 500 men (Light cavalry archers) – There is no hard evidence of Huns at the battle but they are mentioned in the immediate aftermath.

Greuthungi Archers – 500–1,000 men (Light infantry) – Probably some foot archers accompanied the cavalry.

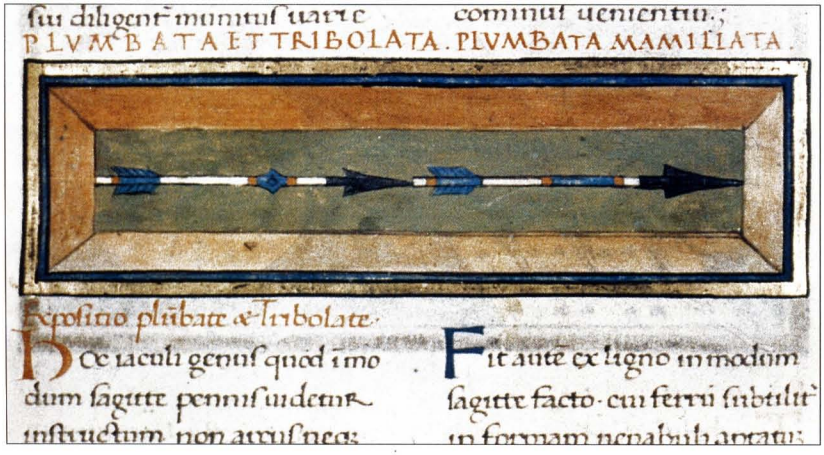
OPPOSING COMMANDERS AND PLANS

THE GOTHS

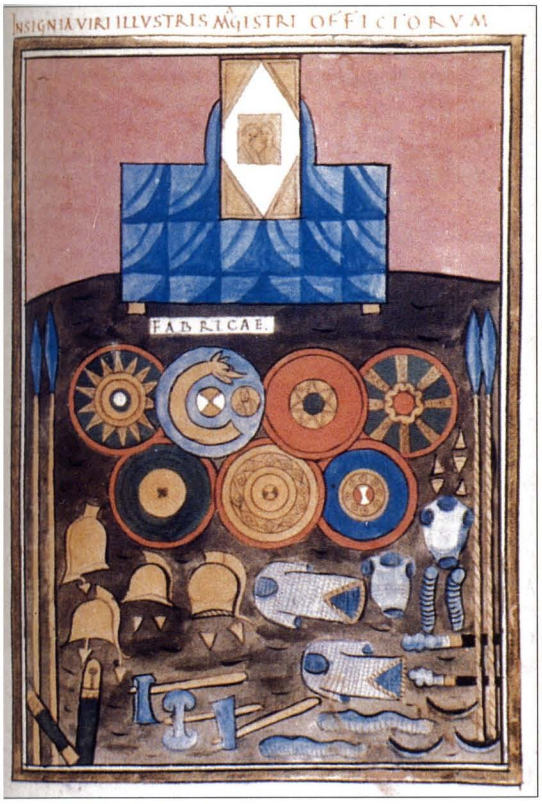
The Goths were not a single unified people. They lived in a number of self-contained units spread from the Danube to the Crimea with no central organisation or administration. Leadership of these bands was very personal. A strong man with a reputation for success in war would attract followers and his power base would grow accordingly. If his luck or prowess began to wane he ran the risk that his followers might decide to attach themselves to a new rising star.

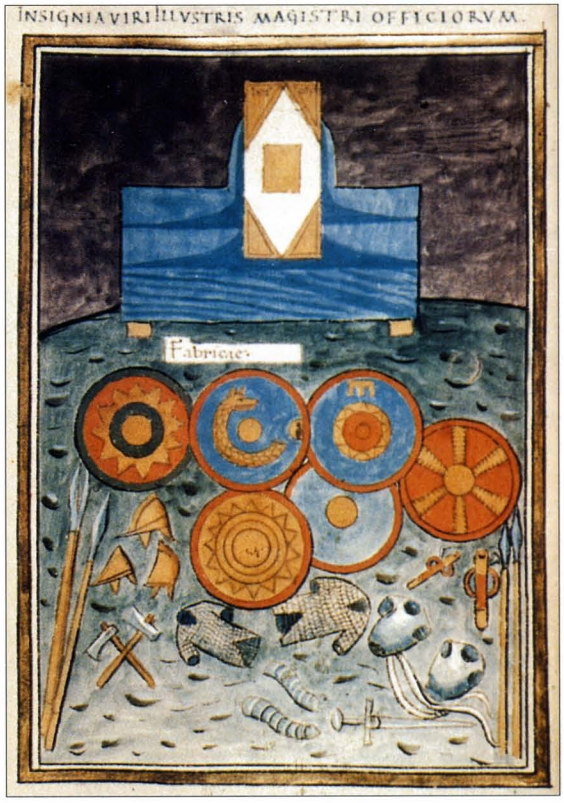
This is what happened to Athanaric, leader of the Tervingi. In the 360s he gave military support to the Roman usurper Procopius. For backing the loser in a Roman dynastic struggle, the Tervingi were attacked and Athanaric was defeated and 'forced to flee for his life.' He then sued for peace, concluding a treaty with the Eastern Emperor Valens. This treaty, like others before it, included an exchange of hostages and probably an agreement for the Tervingi to provide troops to the Emperor on request. A few years later when the Huns invaded the eastern borders of the Tervingi territory, Athanaric was again defeated. This time large numbers of his people abandoned him to follow Alavivus and Fritigern. Athanaric apparently died in Constantinople in 381 after being 'driven from his country by a domestic conspiracy,' and he was buried 'with splendid rites conducted in the Roman manner.'

We know very little about Alavivus other than the fact that he initially led the Tervingi to the Danube and requested permission to cross. From that point on it seems that **Fritigern** gradually emerged as the dominant Tervingi leader, becoming sole leader after escaping an assassination attempt that probably claimed Alavivus' life. Fritigern must have been a



Several *plumbatae* or darts were carried in clips attached to the back of the shields of Roman soldiers. This allowed them to shower their opponents with missiles as they closed. Since the Goths were primarily equipped with Roman arms, they may also have used them. Ammianus frequently refers to exchanges of javelins and other missiles before opposing lines closed to contact. (*De Rebus Bellicis*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)





man of enormous charisma and strength of will. He was able to hold together a confederacy of disparate clans and tribes with no greater authority than a belief in his ability to win. Since his followers included Huns, Alans, Roman deserters and several Germanic tribes, large numbers would have deserted him had they felt better off under someone else's leadership.

Unfortunately we only have brief snippets in Ammianus' account on which to base an assessment of Fritigern's leadership. He was clearly an opportunist, striking when the moment was right and withdrawing when it was not. Ammianus says he was shrewd and resourceful. After crossing the Danube he was, for example, able to unite with the Greuthungi, without seeming to break the terms of his agreement with the Romans. Ammianus also says that Fritigern had 'great foresight and dreaded the uncertainties of battle.' Fritigern's greatest skill as a strategist seems to have been this very point. He only ever risked battle when he knew he could win. He showed similar prudence when his followers were trying to besiege Adrianople: 'Fritigern realised that it was pointless for men without experience of siege-works to fight at such a disadvantage. He suggested that the siege should be abandoned and a sufficient force left behind to contain the enemy. He had no quarrel, he said, with stone walls, and he advised them to attack and pillage in perfect safety the rich and fruitful regions which were still left unguarded. They approved of this plan, in which they knew they had the king's active support and advanced cautiously in small parties over the whole of Thrace.' (Ammianus Marcellinus)

The insignia of the *Magistri Officiorum* who had responsibility for the state arms factories (*fabricae*). One of these factories was located at Adrianople and was emptied by the Goths of Sueridas and Colias when they joined the revolt. In addition to the weapons and armour produced by the *fabricae*, the shields illustrated could represent the units of *scholae*. These were elite cavalry units that followed the Emperor. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

It is interesting to note that Fritigern had to persuade his followers of the wisdom of any given action, he could not simply issue an order and expect it to be carried out. Throughout the campaign, Fritigern's strategy could not be faulted. His ability to split his forces into small groups and then call them together again at key moments would be impressive even in an army with a well-developed command structure and modern communications. He moved cautiously, carried out proper reconnaissance, and was able to deal with the enormous logistical problem of keeping whole peoples supplied with food and equipment without a supply base or any formal supply sources. His overall strategy was to keep his people moving in small groups to ease the supply problems and make it difficult for the Romans to pin him down. When faced with a potential attack from two Imperial armies, however, he was able to draw one of them out and defeat it before their strengths could be combined.

Not much is known about the other Gothic leaders. We are told that **Alatheus** and **Saphrax** jointly led the Greuthingi as guardians of Videric, the young son of King Vithimir who lost his life in battle against the Alans. Videric is no longer mentioned after the Danube crossing which may indicate that his guardians disposed of him.

Many historians have concluded that Saphrax was a Hun or an Alan. In favour of this argument is his non-Germanic name and the fact that at the Battle of Adrianople the Greuthungi were supported by a contingent of Alans. Against this point is the fact that Saphrax had joint leadership of the Greuthungi during their war against the Alans. However, during that war the Greuthungi did employ Hun mercenaries and it is possible that Saphrax could originally have been one of them. There was no strong sense of nationality amongst the Germanic peoples in the 4th century and it was quite common for ambitious young men to join the warband of another tribe. Original race or nationality was no great obstacle to advancement. Since allegiance was based on a personal contract between leader and follower, once a man had sworn to follow someone he would do so loyally, even fighting against his original people. Therefore, whatever Saphrax's original race he was, by AD 376, clearly one of the two main leaders of the Greuthungi.

Another Greuthungi leader was **Farnobius**. He originally accompanied Alatheus and Saphrax in their move to the Danube, but in 377 he was leading a separate force of Goths and Taifali (another Germanic but non-Gothic people). Although he was described by Ammianus as a 'formidable troublemaker' his force was wiped out in its first encounter with the Romans and Farnobius was killed in the battle.

Two other Gothic leaders of note were **Sueridas** and **Colias**. These men were leaders of Gothic troops in Roman service who joined Fritigern after he crossed the Danube. Other than that we know nothing substantial about them.

THE ROMANS

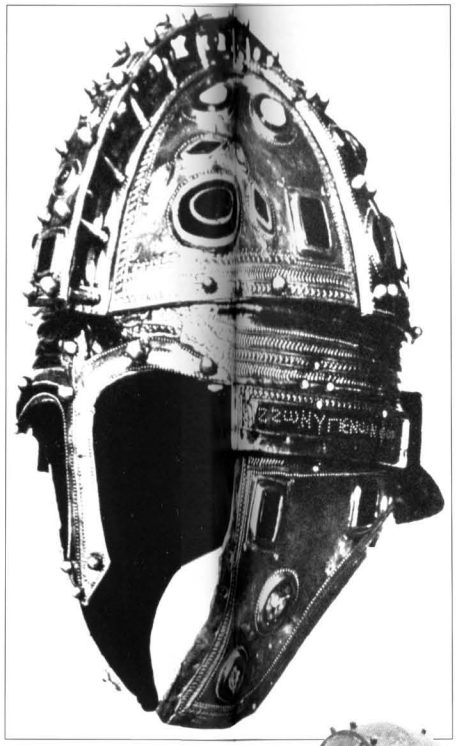
Thanks to the disastrous defeat at Adrianople, **Flavius Valens** the East Roman Emperor (364–378), has gone down in history as an ineffective leader. However, although he undoubtedly made mistakes during the campaign, and paid for these with his life, he was not without skill as a commander. His earlier offensive campaign against the Goths (367–369) was conducted with vigour and skill. Despite the obvious difficulties in carrying out operations against an elusive enemy in their home territory he was able to bring his foes to battle and defeat them.

Valens was nearly 50 years old at the battle of Adrianople and he had spent much of his reign on campaign. He had to fight for his throne against the usurper Procopius, then he launched his attack on the Goths, after which he became embroiled in a dispute with the Persian Empire over Armenia. Ammianus gives a full description of his character: 'He was a faithful and reliable friend, and represented intrigues with severity. He maintained strict discipline in the army and civil service … he was extremely slow to appoint and to remove officials. In his dealings with the provinces he showed great fairness, protecting each of them from injury … He was mild in the assessment of what taxes were due and a harsh and bitter enemy of embezzlers and of officials of corrupt practices … He was unwilling to endure fatigue, though he affected enormous toughness. He had a cruel streak, and was something of a boor, with little skill in the arts of either war or peace … He was dilatory and sluggish, his complexion was dark and the sight of one eye was impaired, though this was not apparent at a distance. He was well made, neither tall nor short, bow legged, and with a somewhat protruding stomach.'

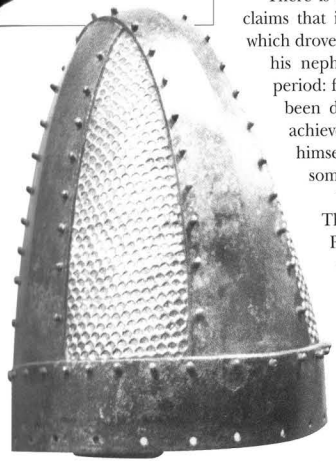
Valens' co-emperor and ruler of the West was his nephew **Flavius Gratianus (Gratian)**. Gratian was described by his contemporaries as 'a young man of remarkable talent, eloquent, controlled, warlike, and merciful, and seemed likely to rival the best of his predecessors while the down of youth was still spreading over his cheeks.' He showed courage and resourcefulness in early campaigns against the Alamanni on the Rhine frontier, and when the Goths revolted he immediately dispatched a picked body of troops to the Danube. When he had secured his base in Gaul, he started to move to his uncle's aid by a series of forced marches.

There is a hint of rivalry between the co-emperors and Ammianus claims that it was Valens' jealousy of Gratian's success on the Rhine which drove him to engage the Goths at Adrianople without waiting for his nephew to reinforce him. 'Two things vexed Valens at this period: first the news that the Lentienses (an Alamannic tribe) had been defeated by Gratian and the exaggerated accounts of his achievements. So he marched [to engage the Goths] eager to put himself on a level with his nephew, whose exploits irked him, by some glorious deed of his own.'

Valens' immediate strategy in 376 was to contain the crisis. The main eastern army was engaged in a campaign against Persia and the western army was fighting the Alamanni on the Rhine frontier. Once revolt seemed imminent Valens probably ordered the assassination attempt on Fritigern and Alavivus in the hope that, leaderless, the Gothic refugees might be cowed into submission. When this failed and the Roman frontier forces were overwhelmed Valens and Gratian dispatched their senior commanders with detachments of troops to conduct a delaying campaign throughout 377 while the main Eastern and Western field armies could be extricated from operations



ABOVE **This expensively decorated helmet found near Berkasova, Serbia, could have been worn by a Gothic or Roman officer. Its iron bowl was sheathed in silver and covered in glass-paste and embossed decoration. Ammianus says that the Emperor Valentinian lost a helmet 'adorned with gold and precious stones' when he escaped from an Alamannic ambush in AD 368. (Vojvodjanski Museum, Novi Sad)**



RIGHT **A 5th century Persian helmet. A great deal of Roman military equipment in the east seems to have been copied from the Sassanid Persians. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)**

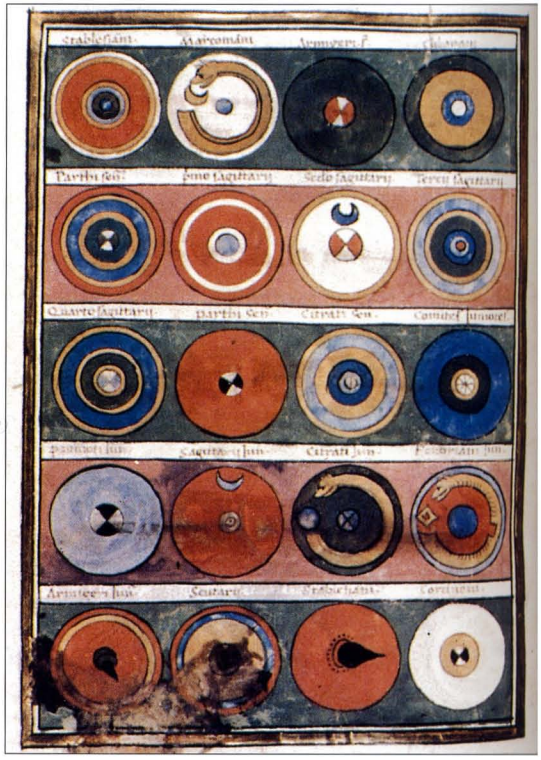
in Armenia and on the Rhine. The plan was for the emperors to unite and force a decisive battle with the Goths in an attempt to destroy them in one go.

A number of other Roman officers played key roles in the campaign against the Goths.

Lupicinus and **Maximus**. Commanders responsible for Thrace and the lower Danube frontier at the time of the Goths' crossing. Both are held responsible by Ammianus for driving the Goths into rebellion: 'Their sinister greed was the source of all our troubles.' Maximus was the local *Dux* (Duke) a military officer who commanded the garrisons in the Danubian frontier zone. As a general he is described as 'disastrous' by Ammianus but we have no record of what specific actions he took during the campaign or of his eventual fate. Lupicinus was the *Comes* (Count) of Thrace and Maximus' superior, with overall military responsibility for the region. As a junior officer of the *Schola Gentilium* (a guards cavalry unit) he campaigned successfully against the Alamanni in the 360s but the Gothic crisis overwhelmed him. Apart from abusing his position to profit from the situation he mishandled an assassination attempt on the Gothic leaders and his forces were decisively beaten by the Gothic rebels at the Battle of Marcianople in 376 and he abandoned his troops and fled from the battlefield.

Profuturus and **Trajan**. East Roman generals dispatched by Valens in 377 to deal with the crisis. Trajan was the senior, holding the rank of *magister peditum* (master of foot). They are described as 'men of high ambition but poor generals.' Rather than wearing the Goths down through attrition they sought to engage them in battle and were defeated at Ad Salices. Trajan was later killed at Adrianople.

Sebastian. A West Roman officer and veteran of Julian's expedition against the Persians (362). He was very popular with troops and had previously campaigned successfully against the Alamanni and Quadi. He was seen as a potential threat to the Emperor Gratian and was therefore sent by Gratian from Italy to help Valens. Valens appointed him *magister peditum* to replace Trajan after the Battle of Ad Salices and he waged a vigorous and successful guerrilla campaign against the Goths in 378. Sebastian played a key role in encouraging Valens to engage the Goths at Adrianople without waiting for reinforcements from Gratian. This was probably



OPPOSITE **The *Notitia Dignitatum*, unfortunately, does not show any shield patterns for cavalry in the eastern army. This illustration shows the western cavalry units in the early 5th century. However, some of the units shown here are also recorded as serving in the eastern armies, these include the *Promoti* (first row, second shield), *Batavi Iuniores* (third row, fourth shield), *Armigeri* – there were several units of *Armigeri* (fourth row, first shield; sixth row, third shield; and last row, first shield), *Dalmatae* – again there were several (fourth row, third and fourth shields); *Scutarii* (fifth row, last shield), and *Primi Sagittarii* (seventh row, second shield). It is possible that the unit of *Taifali* (fifth row, first shield) may have been formed from the Taifali prisoners who were sent to Italy after being defeated by Frigeridus in 377. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)**

prompted by the fact that Sebastian was out of favour with Gratian. He paid for this with his life on the battlefield.

Richomeres. Gratian's *magister militum* (master of soldiers) who was sent to aid Valens in 377 bringing with him several under-strength units. He led the Roman forces at Ad Salices and played a leading part in the negotiations with the Goths prior to Adrianople. His precise role in the battle is unclear but he did survive.

Saturninus. Temporarily appointed *magister equitum* (master of cavalry) in 377 to take command of the East Roman forces from Profuturus and Trajan after the defeat at Ad Salices, while Victor (the permanent *magister equitum*) was still engaged on the Persian front. His delaying tactics against the Goths initially succeeded but he was overwhelmed and forced to leave the enemy free to ravage Thrace. He survived Adrianople and became Consul in 383.

Victor. Valens' *magister equitum* (master of cavalry). Of Sarmatian origin, he is described as being prudent and cautious. At the outset of the campaign he was left in the east to negotiate a peace settlement with the Persians after which he joined Valens at Adrianople. He probably commanded the cavalry during the battle and managed to survive.

Frigeridus. An experienced western commander and veteran of the Emperor Julian's army of the 350s. As Count of Illyricum he successfully defeated the roving bands of Goths and Taifali in that region. However, he was replaced in 378 by a political appointee of the Western Emperor Gratian, much to Ammianus' disgust. 'At the very moment when we were reeling under disasters a cautious and careful general was dismissed, who, even if he had been long retired, ought to have been recalled to duty in such a grave crisis.'

Merobaudes. Gratian's *magister peditum* who was responsible for inciting western troops to desert rather that go to the east to fight the Goths. He was motivated by a desire to ensure that the Rhine frontier was not left open.

Cassio and **Bacurius**. Medium ranking officers who led the advance guard at the Battle of Adrianople. They rashly attacked the Goths without authority, precipitating the battle before the Romans were fully deployed. Bacurius was from the eastern frontier near Armenia.

THE CAMPAIGN

THE GOTHIC REVOLT, AD 376

Relations deteriorated rapidly between the Goths and their Roman hosts. After being kept for a long time in the immediate vicinity of the Danube crossing, the Goths finally broke out of their containment area and began to move south towards Marcianople (Devnja, Bulgaria), where they hoped to settle. This move was apparently not authorised by the Romans but they made no attempt to stop the Goths, no doubt because their forces were spread too thinly.

Lupicinus decided to try to bring the Goths back under control by assassinating their leaders. He invited Alavivus and Fritigern to a sumptuous dinner party letting them believe that in addition to food, drink and entertainment, they would discuss provisions for their people. He allowed only the leaders and their immediate bodyguard to enter the town and then kept the bodyguard outside his headquarters while the leaders dined. Lupicinus ordered troops to kill the Gothic bodyguards while others manned the walls to prevent any rescue attempt. Ammianus' description of the incident is confusing but clearly things went awry. Fighting broke out and some Goths outside the town 'killed and stripped of their arms a large contingent of troops' and laid siege to the town. It is not clear whether Lupicinus intended to keep the leaders hostage or kill them, but Alavivus apparently perished while Fritigern managed to escape. Jordanes says that Fritigern managed to fight his way

The Emperor Valentinian surrounded by his guards. Valentinian died in AD 375, and was succeeded by Gratian. The various shield designs indicate that the soldiers come from several different units. The shield on the far left is similar to several cavalry unit designs. (Musée d'art et histoire, Geneva)

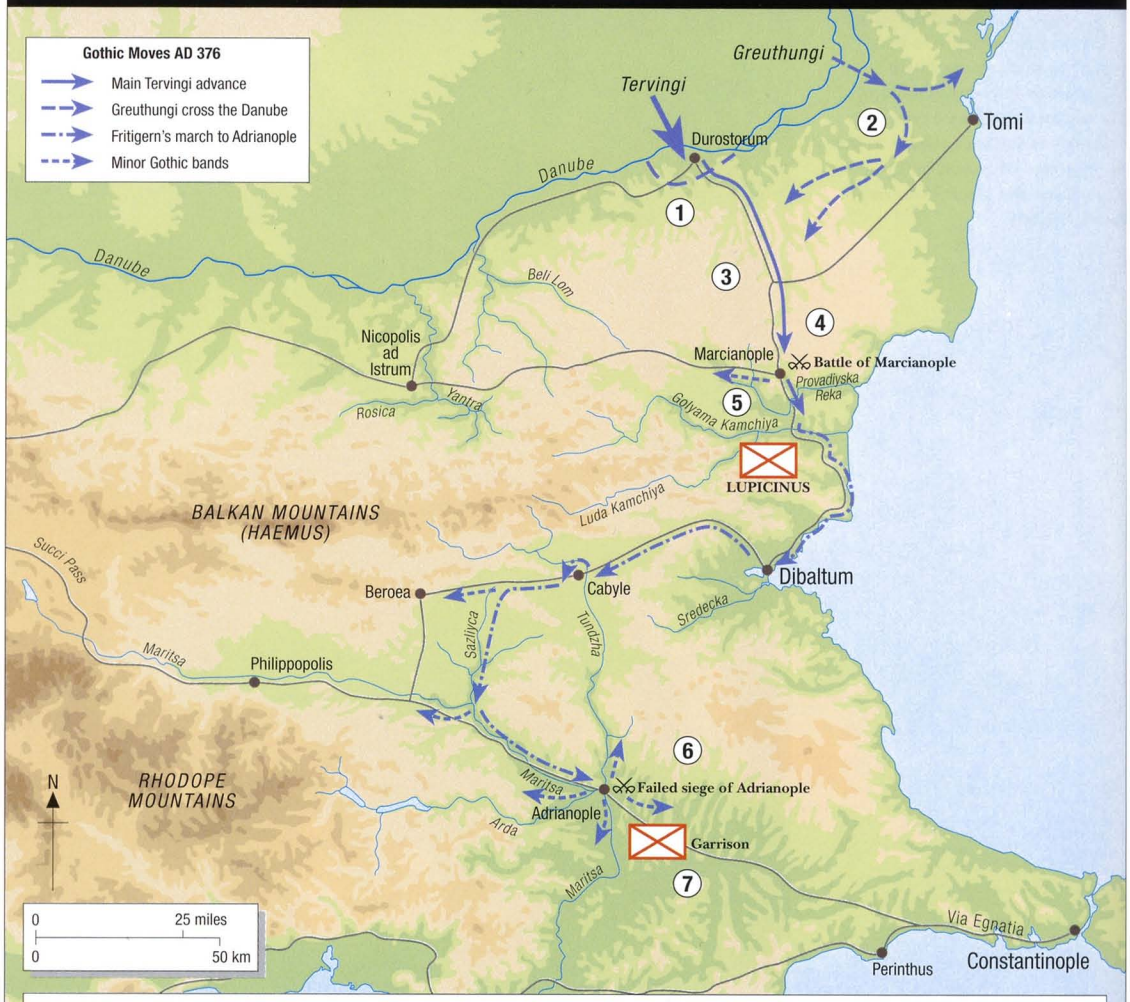
These soldiers probably represent 5th century *limitanei* from Egypt. The shield pattern on the foremost figure is very similar to that for the *Legio Macedonica V*. Detachments of this legion were part of the *limitanei* of *Dacia Ripenses* in the 4th century. (Museum für Spätantike und Byzantinisches Kunst, Berlin)

out, while Ammianus says he was able to convince Lupicinus that he would try to pacify his followers in order to avoid battle.

However he did it, Fritigern rejoined his people and together they began looting and burning the farms and villas surrounding the town. Lupicinus quickly gathered troops and marched out of the city to challenge the Goths. The forces engaged nine miles from the city, most likely to the west. It is unclear how many troops were involved or who they were. Fritigern's force at this point probably consisted entirely of Tervingi who had crossed the Danube with him, since there is no mention of the Greuthungi contingent being anywhere near Marcianople at the time and the other contingents had not yet joined up.

At Adrianople the significantly reinforced Tervingi probably numbered around 10,000–12,000. At this point Fritigern would have had far fewer

THRACE AD 376 – THE GOTHIC REVOLT



1. Having been given permission to cross the Danube river and enter the Roman Empire, the Tervingi are kept penned in the immediate area of their crossing. Without land or homes and desperately short of food discontent begins to rise.

2. Led by Alatheus and Saphrax, the Greuthungi, also displaced by the predations of the Huns and Alans, request asylum within the Empire. They are refused. With the Roman frontier forces stretched to breaking point, the Greuthungi slip across the Danube and unite with Fritigern.

3. With their situation now critical and with sufficient numbers to defy the local Roman officials, the Goths break out of their containment area near the Danube and strike south towards the fertile area around Marcianople. Although defying the Roman administration, they are not yet in open revolt.

4. With local forces too weak to oppose the Goths the local *comes*, Lupicinus attempts to assassinate Alavivus and Fritigern in a bid to bring the Goths under control. The result is a disaster. Alavivus is killed but Fritigern escapes and the Goths break into open revolt.

5. Lupicinus attacks the Goths 9 miles outside Marcianople with hastily gathered local troops. His force is annihilated and the Goths equip themselves with Roman armour and weapons. Fritigern then marches south towards Adrianople.

6. Fearing they will join Fritigern, Roman troops of Gothic origin stationed in Adrianople are ordered to move east. When they ask for two days to prepare they are attacked by the local populace. They rebel and inflict heavy casualties. Arming themselves with Roman equipment they join forces with Fritigern.

7. Fritigern's Goths attempt an unsuccessful siege of Adrianople. Several attempts to storm the city are beaten off. With winter coming on the Goths abandon the siege and break into small bands, better able to forage and feed themselves.

followers, perhaps about 7,000–8,000 combatants. Likewise it is hard to estimate how many troops Lupicinus could raise. There were about 20,000–30,000 *limitanei* along the lower Danube to the north, but since there was still tremendous instability and danger along the frontier, he probably would not have been in any position to withdraw them. The regional army in Thrace in AD 395 consisted of about 7 *vexillationes*

The shield designs of several units of *auxilia palatina* of the Eastern Praesental Army circa AD 395. All but the last six units were in existence at the time of Adrianople. The last five units were raised by Theodosius after the battle, while the *Visi* (third row, third shield) may have been Goths, recruited from Fritigern's followers after the peace treaty of AD 382. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

(3,500 cavalry at full strength) and 21 legions (up to 21,000 infantry), which may give an indication of the numbers of troops throughout the region. Four of these *vexillationes* were raised after 378 so it is probable that Lupicinus had considerably less cavalry. Although there is no guarantee that the forces in Thrace listed in the *Notitia* resembled the troops available to Lupicinus, it at least gives us an idea of what was possible.

Not all of the Thracian field army would have been at Marcianople. Some would have been keeping an eye on the Greuthungi, others would no doubt have been positioned near Nicopolis ad Istrum (Nikljup, Bulgaria) ready to reinforce the frontier forces, while still others would probably have been stationed at the key towns of Cabyle (Kabile, near Jambol, Bulgaria), Dibaltum (Burgas, Bulgaria), Beroea (Stara Zagora, Bulgaria) and Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria), guarding the approaches into the lowlands south of the Haemus (Balkan) Mountains. If we assume a total of about 20,000–25,000 troops at full paper strength throughout the province, there could not have been many more than 5,000 in and around Marcianople at the time of the revolt. Furthermore Ammianus makes the point that Lupicinus mustered his troops with 'tumultuous speed' and advanced with 'more haste than caution,' implying that he did not take time to call in troops from further afield before engaging. No doubt, after bungling the assassination, he wanted to rectify the situation as quickly as possible with whatever troops were immediately at hand.

The forces that met outside Marcianople, therefore, probably numbered about 5,000–8,000 fighting men each, although the Goths would have had many more non-combatants nearby. The vast majority on both sides would have been foot soldiers. If the *Notitia* is anything to go by then Lupicinus would have had not more than about 1,000 horsemen and the Goths probably the same or less. Ammianus says Fritigern escaped from Marcianople on a horse, but very few others would have obtained horses by this point in the campaign.

The Goths were ill-fed and poorly equipped but had recently managed to take arms from the troops they engaged and defeated earlier outside the city walls. They were also driven on by desperation. There is no indication of the morale of the Romans but we can presume they were as confident as any body of trained troops going out to deal with what they saw as a rabble.

When the armies were in view of each other the Romans deployed defensively. This was a normal tactic for an infantry force since, by the 4th century, cavalry had become the main offensive arm of Roman armies. Ammianus describes what happened then: 'The barbarians hurled themselves recklessly on our lines, dashing their shields upon the bodies of their opponents and running them through with spears and

swords. In this furious and bloody assault our standards were snatched from us and our tribunes and the greater part of our men perished, all but their luckless commander. While the others were away fighting his one aim was to get away, and he made for the city at a gallop. After this the enemy armed themselves with Roman weapons and roamed at large unresisted.'

This brief description brings out a number of key points. First of all the Goths relied, as was typical for all Germanic armies, on a fierce charge in attack columns that depended on breaking their opponents in the first rush. If this succeeded, as it did here at Marcianople, then they would sweep the field unless the enemy had a solid second line to hold them. Another key tactic was to use their shields offensively. The warriors would grip the shield by a bar in the centre, which was covered by an iron or bronze boss, and they would use it to punch with deadly effect. The final point to note is that if Ammianus is correct that most of the Romans were killed, then there would have been enough weapons and armour to go around to completely equip all the Tervingi warriors.

This medallion showing the Emperor Valens was found in Szilagysomlyo, Hungary, the area of Pannonia settled by the Greuthungi after Adrianople. It is thought to be a Greuthungi copy of a Roman original. (Author's photo)

The Revolt Spreads

The situation had now changed dramatically and having defeated Lupicinus, the Goths overnight became the masters of Thrace. There was no one to oppose them. The remaining detachments of the Thracian field army would have remained bottled up in the key cities, none of them individually strong enough to take on the Goths. Valens with the eastern praesental army was still in the east facing the Persians, while Gratian with the main western army was engaged with the Alamanni along the Rhine.

The situation worsened when Roman troops of Gothic origin joined the revolt. These men, led by Suerdias and Colias, were in winter quarters at Adrianople. At first they remained loyal to Rome but the situation changed when they were ordered to move east out of fear that they would join Fritigern who was moving south towards Adrianople. The soldiers requested a two-day delay to prepare and asked for food and money for the journey. However, the chief magistrate of Adrianople refused and incited the 'dregs of the populace' and the workers from the armaments factory that was located in the city, to rise against the Goths and force them to leave. According to Ammianus, the magistrate was partly motivated by a desire for revenge because Goths had pillaged his suburban villa. 'The Goths remained immovable but when they were finally driven desperate by curses and abuse and a few missiles were hurled at them, they broke out into open rebellion. They slew very many citizens, whom their too impudent attack had entrapped and put to flight the rest, wounding them with various kinds of weapons. Then, plundering the dead bodies and arming themselves with Roman equipment, they joined forces with Fritigern whom they saw to be near at hand.' (Ammianus Marcellinus)

Fritigern, who had now reached Adrianople, initially attempted a siege of the city. His troops tried unsuccessfully on several occasions to storm the walls and Ammianus says that 'they lost some men of

outstanding valour whom they were unable to avenge, and arrows and sling stones accounted for many of them.'

Although the remaining garrison of the city must have been very small and probably included very few trained soldiers, they managed to hold off the Goths, whose attacks on the city were 'disorderly and unconcentrated.' Fritigern, therefore, abandoned the siege, and with winter coming on, he split his force up into small bands which would be better able to forage and feed themselves.

Meanwhile Fritigern's numbers continued to increase. Goths, who had been sold into slavery at an earlier date, took the opportunity to flee their Roman masters. Some Roman prisoners switched sides and others joined voluntarily, giving the Goths a valuable source of local intelligence. Amongst these were a large number of miners from gold mines located in the mountains of Thrace and Macedonia. Ammianus says that these men were particularly useful to the Goths as they could direct them 'to concealed stores of grain and hidden corners where people had taken refuge.'

THE CAMPAIGN OF AD 377

Things were now critical for both sides. For the Romans, it was clear that a major effort would be needed to defeat the Goths and yet not enough high quality troops were immediately available. There was still incredible pressure along the frontiers. The Huns and Alans who had triggered this chain of events were still a threat and bands of them had moved up to the Danube. There were many other groups of Germans who might be tempted to cross into Roman territory either to escape the Huns or to take advantage of a weakening of Roman defences. The Quadi along the upper Danube had recently been in conflict with the Western Empire and had agreed an uneasy peace in 375. The Taifali and other bands of Goths on the north side of the middle Danube were hostile, while the Alamanni and Franks along the Rhine were constantly on the look-out for an opportunity to break into Gaul.

To get anything like the number and quality of troops needed, Valens would have to withdraw the praesental army from operations against the Persians in Armenia. However, to do this he would first need to conclude a peace with the Persian Empire and leave enough troops in the east to ensure the Persians did not take advantage of the situation. This meant that Valens would need to buy time.

If the Roman situation was difficult, the Goths were desperate. They may have defeated the local forces and forced the Romans to bottle themselves up in fortified cities, but the Goths had no refuge and no reliable source of food or supplies. Their only hope for long-term survival was to force the Romans to conclude a peace and give them land to settle and farm – in effect re-establishing the original terms of their agreement with Valens when they crossed the Danube. Time was their enemy. The longer it took to come to favourable terms with the Romans the greater the chances of being defeated by starvation. Having no supply source, the Goths were forced to forage in small bands over a very wide area. This meant that individual bands could be picked off and destroyed by larger, better equipped Roman forces. It also made it more

Many high-ranking Roman generals, such as Stilicho depicted here, were not of Roman origin. Victor, Valens' *magister equitum*, was a Sarmatian.

'Collecting the dregs of the populace along with the workers in the arsenal ... [the chief magistrate] put arms in their hands, ordered trumpets to sound and threatened the Goths with the most dire consequences if they did not depart ... The Goths stood stock still, till at last a storm of curses and abuse, accompanied by an occasional missile, drove them into open revolt.' – Ammianus Marcellinus. (Howard Gerrard)

Constantine's Basilica Trier. Trier (Augusta Treverorum) was Gratian's capital and the base for his operations along the Rhine. (Rahmel-Verlag GmbH)

likely that individual chieftains might reject Fritigern's leadership and break off on their own. Fritigern's problem was that he needed large enough numbers of men to defeat a Roman army and force favourable peace terms but at the same time the more men he had, the greater the chance that hunger would defeat him. Furthermore, having no home, the Goths were also accompanied by large numbers of non-combatants who needed protection and food.

Valens knew this, but he could not simply stand back and allow the Goths free rein in Thrace without losing political and domestic support. Therefore he sent Victor, his *magister equitum*, to Persia to conclude an agreement in the east while withdrawing some troops from Armenia and sending them under the command of Profuturus and Trajan to engage the Goths in a guerrilla campaign. He also requested additional troops from Gratian in the west.

It is not clear what sort of force Profuturus and Trajan were commanding, but it was clearly predominantly infantry since Ammianus specifically mentions they commanded 'the legions brought from Armenia.' He goes on to say that although these eastern legions had previously given a good account of themselves, they were not used to this sort of fighting and were outnumbered. They did, however, manage to drive some of the Goths out of the lowlands and force them to take refuge in the rugged Balkan mountains where it was hoped that they would 'ultimately perish from hunger.'

Meanwhile Gratian responded to his uncle's request for aid by sending the ageing general Frigeridus with reinforcements that Ammianus calls 'Pannonian and Transalpine auxiliaries (*Pannonicis et Transalpinis auxiliis*).' It is difficult to determine with any certainty what

The massive Aqueduct of Valens supplied Constantinople with water. Although it may have been constructed during Valens' reign it is unlikely that he supervised it since the Emperor was unpopular in Constantinople and spent very little time there. (Author's photo)

sort of troops these were, possibly they were *limitanei* drawn from those geographical regions. Although Ammianus specifically calls them auxiliaries, it is unlikely they were elite *auxilia palatina* since he usually refers to such troops by their unit name. The implication of the description is that they were generic second-rate troops.

Gratian also sent Richomeres, his commander of household troops (*comes domesticorum*), at the head of a number of troops drawn from the Gallic field army. When these units were ordered to move east there were mass desertions. This was not an unusual occurrence. Despite the fact that the field armies were supposed to be mobile, long-distance postings usually resulted in desertions or even mutiny. This happened when the Gallic troops were ordered east to fight the Persians in the 350s. This time the desertions were apparently encouraged by Merobaudes, the *magister peditum* in the west, who did not want Gaul stripped of its defences since he feared it would leave the province wide open to raids from across the Rhine – a justifiable fear as events were to prove. In any case it is clear that the units following Richomeres were greatly depleted, probably under half strength.

The Battle of Ad Salices

It is not clear what the Goths were doing while the western reinforcements marched east. Some were blocked up in the Balkan mountain passes but not all of them. A large number were located in the low-lying region of Scythia near the mouth of the Danube. It is possible

THE CAMPAIGN OF AD 377 – THE STRUGGLE TO CONTAIN THE GOTHS

1. A large force of Goths are located in the region of Scythia near the mouth of the Danube. These may be newcomers who have recently crossed the Danube or a group that avoided attempts to drive them into the Balkan mountains.

2. The pressure on the frontier is still severe with the Taifali and other hostile bands of Goths on the north side of the Danube. In addition groups of Huns and Alans have now moved up to the river.

3. Eastern Roman forces commanded by Profuturus and Trajan and consisting of legions withdrawn from Armenia combine with Western troops under Richomeres and Frigeridus. The Western forces consist of auxiliaries and under-strength units from the Gallic field army.

4. The Romans abandon the guerrilla strategy and are attacked by the Goths at Ad Salices. The action is indecisive but both sides suffer heavy casualties. The only Roman army available to face the Goths is no longer a viable fighting force. The Romans withdraw south to Marcianople.

5. Once more avoiding battle with the Goths the Romans position troops to block all the passes leading from the Balkan mountains. These efforts are possibly supported by units of *limitanei* withdrawn from areas now under Goth control. The Romans defeat a number of attempts to break out by the Goths.

6. Split into small bands and unable to join together in sufficient strength to overcome the Roman cordon the Goths grow increasingly desperate.

7. Some of the Goths, probably those that fought at Ad Salices, make an alliance with some of the Huns and Alans along the Danube and entice them across the river.

8. With the balance of power now shifted Saturninus the Roman commander concentrates his forces to avoid his outposts being overrun. This opens the passes allowing the Goths, Huns and Alans to break out into the lowlands of southern Thrace.

9. During the autumn of AD 377 bands of predatory barbarians spread throughout the province in search of food, supplies and booty.

10. Most Roman troops are bottled up in the towns. Some elite units remain in the field and skirmish with the Goths. One such action takes place outside the town of Dibaltum.

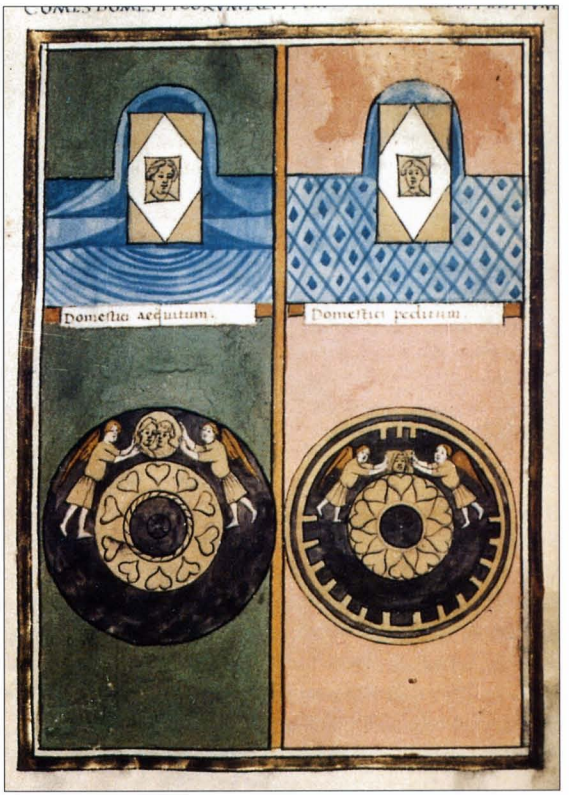
11. The Goths, now seeking a military victory to force the Romans to make terms, aim to dislodge the Western troops under Frigeridus from Beroea.

12. Frigeridus does not wait to be attacked but withdraws over the Succi pass back to Illyricum. It is now clear that a major Roman expedition by the main imperial armies will be required in AD 378 if the Goths are to be dislodged from Thrace.

that these were newcomers, possibly Greuthungi, who had recently moved across the river. Or they may have been a band that had managed to escape attempts by Profuturus and Trajan to drive them into the Balkan Mountains.

Frigeridus and Richomeres linked up with Profuturus and Trajan near the town of Ad Salices ('By the Willows' in the Dobrogei region of south-eastern Romania). 'Not far away was a countless horde of barbarians, who had drawn up their wagons in a circle, inside which they were taking their ease and enjoying their rich plunder as if they were protected by city walls.' (Ammianus Marcellinus)

Richomeres took command of the combined Roman forces and looked for an opportunity to attack. The Romans were not strong enough to assault the Gothic wagon laager but were content to wait, knowing the Goths would eventually have to move to find food or to avoid disease from a fouled camp. Once they moved, the Romans could fall on the vulnerable column and wear it down through a series of hit-and-run attacks. The Goths were kept informed of the Roman intentions by deserters and knowing their vulnerability, remained in place as long as they could, while sending out calls to other scattered parties to reinforce them. Their call was answered and before long the Goths felt strong enough to attempt to attack the nearby Romans.



The Insignia of the *Comes Domesticorum* – Commander of the *domestici et protectores* – a sort of staff college for promising young officers being groomed for higher command. Individual 'officer cadets' probably served as staff officers on campaign, possibly carrying shields similar to those depicted here for the *Domestici Equitum* and *Domestici Peditum* with gold designs on a black background. Richomeres was the Western *Comes Domesticorum*. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

A large party of reinforcements reached the Goths one evening and there was a clamour amongst the men in the wagon laager to attack at once, despite the approach of nightfall. Probably the situation inside the laager had become quite desperate with shortages of food and water and insanitary conditions adding a sense of urgency to the natural desire to try to break out. The Gothic leaders managed to hold their men back, but both Romans and Goths spent a sleepless night.

Early the next morning the Goths attacked. We have no idea of the number of troops involved in the battle, but they were clearly not large armies. The Romans consisted of the legions withdrawn from Armenia, Frigeridus' auxiliaries, and the under-strength units commanded by Richomeres. It is possible that not all the Armenian legions were present since some may have been detached to watch the Balkan passes, although this may have been delegated to the remnants of the Thracian field army or even local *limitanei*. A reasonable estimate, therefore, would be about 5,000–6,000 men, almost all infantry, although a small number of cavalry were present. The quality of the troops would not have been high. Ammianus says that the eastern troops were not used to fighting Germans, while many of the western troops had deserted.

Ammianus says the Goths had more troops, and since they were tempted to attack, this could be true. But their advantage could not have been overwhelming or the Romans would have avoided battle. There is no mention of any of the key Gothic leaders being present, so although

LEFT **Many western German tribes buried their dead together with personal possessions and weapons such as this complete armoury found in the grave of a 6th century Frank. The Goths, however, did not do this and consequently we have much less knowledge of their weapons and equipment. By the time of Adrianople, however, Fritigern's followers would have been completely equipped with Roman arms and armour. (Museum Burg Linn, Krefeld)**

OPPOSITE **The insignia of the *Magister Militum per Thracis*, commander of the Thracian field army. He commanded 21 legions whose shield designs are depicted here in order of seniority. It is likely that all of these units were in existence at the time of Adrianople. The last three units (*Augustenses*, *Valentinianenses* and *Gratianenses*) were probably raised or renamed by Valens in honour of himself (as Augustus of the East) and his western colleagues (Valentinian and Gratian). Most or all of the legions represented here may have formed the army that Lupicinus commanded in 376. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)**

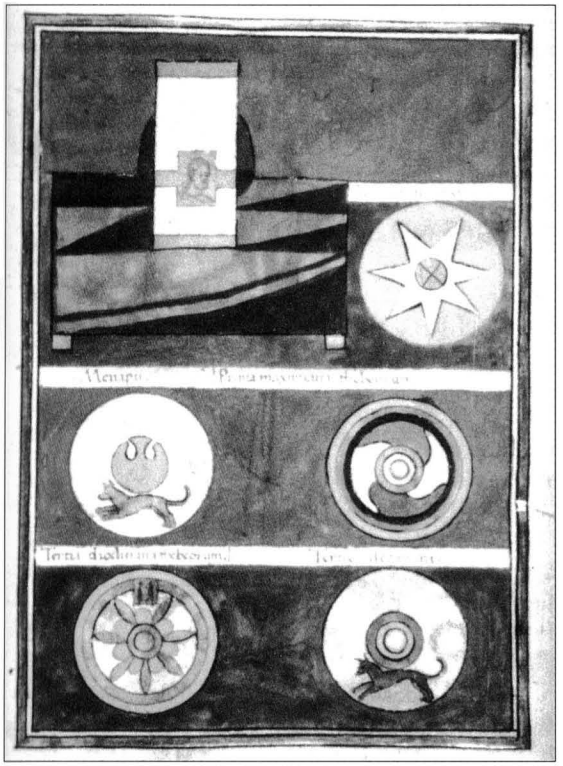
this was a significant band, it was not the main Gothic force. It would have been quite a bit smaller, therefore, than the approximately 10,000 Tervingi following Fritigern at Adrianople. Probably their fighting quality was high, with desperation adding an additional incentive since they were in a 'win-or-die' situation. Like the Romans, the Goths were mostly on foot and some may have managed to equip themselves with Roman weapons and armour. Their force also included a number of Roman deserters.

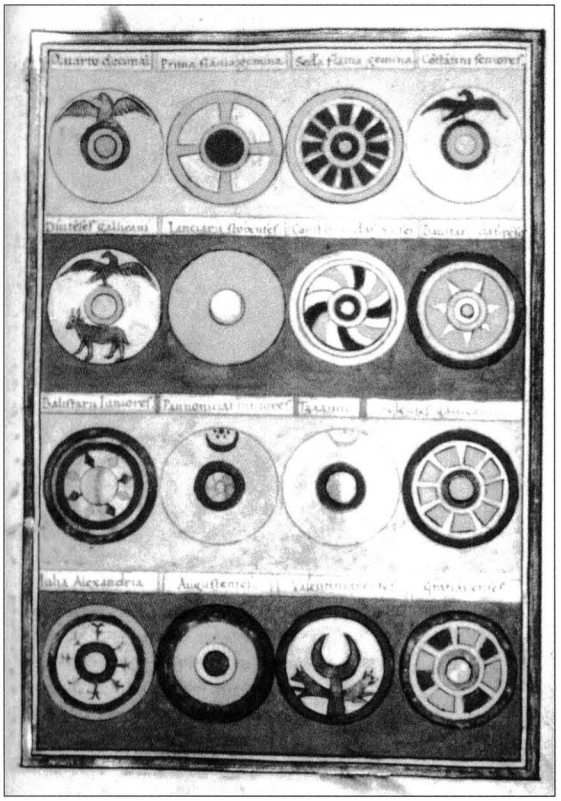
The Goths left the wagon laager, no doubt leaving some men behind to defend the non-combatants. They seized some high ground from which to charge down on the Romans who were deploying nearby. Ammianus provides a colourful account of the engagement: 'Our men hurried to their stations and stood fast; no one strayed about or left the ranks to make a sally. When both sides had advanced cautiously and halted, the opposing warriors glared at each other with mutual ferocity. The Romans raised their morale by striking up their battle-cry; this begins on a low note and swells to a loud roar, and goes by the native name of "barritus"... while this discordant clamour in diverse tongues was going on, skirmishing began. After an exchange of javelins and other missiles at long range, the opposing sides clashed and fought foot to foot with shields locked in tortoise formation.

'The barbarians who were always alert and nimble ... broke through our left wing. This gave way, but a strong body of reserves made a fierce counter-attack from close by and rescued our men from the very jaws of death ...

'The fugitives on each side were pursued by cavalry, who hacked at their heads and backs with all their strength, while at the same time men on foot hamstrung those who had got away but were checked by fright. The whole field was strewn with corpses, among whom were some only half dead who still nursed a futile hope of survival. A number had fallen by sling-shot or had been transfixed by iron tipped arrows.'

The battle went on all day and as evening came on both sides withdrew exhausted and in disorder to their respective camps. Ammianus puts a positive spin on the result saying, 'it is certain that the Romans who were far fewer, suffered great loss in this fight against superior numbers, but in spite of that they inflicted severe distress on the





barbarian host.' However, although the battle may not have been a rout for the Romans, it certainly was a strategic defeat since the only army free to take on the Goths in offensive operations was no longer a viable fighting force.

The Roman strategy had been right but Valens' generals had failed to implement it properly. Ammianus blames Profuturus and Trajan: 'In the region where they had to operate, the right policy was to wear down the enemy piecemeal by guerrilla warfare, but this pair took the untimely and dangerous course of engaging the barbarians ... with the legions brought from Armenia.'

The western generals, however, need to take some of the blame as well, especially as Richomeres was in overall command. Rather than risking all on a battle he could not be sure of winning, he should have skirmished and delayed, wearing the Goths down through attrition. However, the temptation to win fame through a glorious victory was too great – a temptation which Valens himself would soon succumb to.

Apart from its strategic significance, Ad Salices is interesting as an example of a classic set-piece battle between Romans and Germans. The Romans deployed defensively in two lines, or perhaps given the small numbers, with a main line and reserve. The Goths would have attacked in dense columns in a single mass but, unlike Hollywood representations, this was not a wild disorganised charge. The Goths moved forward deliberately and cautiously, halting at javelin range. Then the two lines tried to intimidate each other, and raise their own morale, by shouting war cries, banging on their shields, and insulting their opponents. This gave way to an engagement with missile weapons, mostly javelins from the front ranks, but probably also archers shooting from rear ranks over the heads of the spearmen. Ammianus also mentions slings being used. Finally the two shieldwalls crashed together, each trying to force the other back in a massive shoving match. As so often happened in a battle between Romans and Germans, the first Roman line gave way under the weight of the denser Gothic formation, but the reserves moved up to restore the situation. In this case, the traditionally weak left wing gave way, while the rest of the line managed to hold. The cavalry, small in numbers in this instance, hovered on the flanks, seeking opportunities and pursuing fugitives.

War of Attrition

After Ad Salices the Goths remained in the vicinity while the Romans withdrew south to Marcianople. The Romans had learned their lesson and made no further attempt to engage the Goths in battle. Instead they positioned troops to block all the passes leading south from the Balkan mountains. Ammianus says that the Goths made no attempt to follow up and break out to the south: 'This gave our forces the opportunity to build high barriers to confine the other huge hordes of Barbarians in the defiles of the Balkan range, hoping of course, that this destructive enemy host, penned between the Danube and the wilderness and unable to find a way out, would perish from lack of food, all the necessities of life having been removed to the fortified towns, none of which the barbarians even attempted to besiege owing to their total ignorance of operations of this kind.'

Blocking all routes south through or around the Balkans would not have been an easy task. The region around Marcianople running for about 100kms from the Black Sea coast to the eastern edge of the Balkans is rough but penetrable in several places and the Romans would have been spread fairly thin trying to seal it off. Since it seems that the whole area north of the Balkans to the Danube had been abandoned, it is likely that the *limitanei* from Scythia, Moesia II and Dacia Ripenses would have been withdrawn south of the Balkans, providing more men to guard the passes and key towns. The paper strength of the *limitanei* from these three Ducates was about 30,000. By now, this number would have been greatly reduced by casualties and desertion, perhaps leaving no more than 10,000 to add to the over-stretched *comitatenses*.

On top of this, other Gothic bands, including Fritigern and his immediate followers, were probably not in the area between the Balkans and the Danube. Since they had been operating as far south as Adrianople earlier, it is quite likely that they were confined in the southern defiles of the Balkans, just north of Beroea. This would have necessitated spreading Roman resources even further to keep them penned in.

Valens appointed Saturninus *magister equitum* and sent him to take command from Trajan and Profuturus. Richomeres returned to Gaul to raise new troops while Frigeridus moved south to Beroea where he fortified a position that watched the key passes from Illyricum in the west and the central Balkans to the north. In spite of the difficulty of the task, the Romans managed to keep the Goths blocked up. Ammianus says that Saturninus 'arranged a system of outposts and pickets' and despite several attempts to break out, the Goths were driven back by the Romans 'who put up a stout resistance on the rugged terrain.'

The fields and villages of the region would have long been stripped of food and, as autumn approached, the Goths were in a very difficult

RIGHT **This plain long sword (*spatha*) was typical of the side arm carried by rank-and-file Roman soldiers. After their victory at Marcianople many Goths would also have equipped themselves with Roman swords. (Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn)**

ABOVE AND LEFT **The large oval or round shields carried by Goths and Romans were held by a central hand grip behind a protruding iron or bronze boss. The shields could, therefore, be used offensively by punching the opponent with the central boss. These show a 4th century shield boss and hand grip from Trevoux, France. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)**

position. They were in small scattered bands out of necessity, otherwise foraging would have been impossible. However, since many of them were blockaded in different mountain defiles, they could not join together with enough men to overrun the Roman pickets. Driven by desperation some of the Goths, probably the same group which had fought at Ad Salices, made an alliance with some Huns and Alans and enticed them across the Danube to join them.

It must have been a fairly significant number of Huns and Alans who joined up since they altered the balance enough that Saturninus felt it necessary to concentrate his forces to avoid individual outposts being overrun. This may have saved Roman casualties but it also left the passes open, allowing the Goths, Huns and Alans to break out into the lowlands of southern Thrace. Throughout the autumn, bands of barbarians spread throughout the province from the Black Sea to the Rhodope Mountains and from the Danube to the Hellespont in search of food, supplies and booty.

Roman troops fortified the main towns but having learned from previous engagements, made no attempt to try to bring the enemy to battle. By and large the Goths had free rein throughout the countryside and those Romans who were unable to take refuge in towns were killed or taken captive. It seems, however, that some small groups of elite Roman troops remained in the field to skirmish with the Goths, probably operating out of the main cities and engaging groups of raiders when the opportunity arose. Ammianus tells of one incident in which Barzimeres, 'tribune of the *Scutarii* and a veteran commander,' was attacked by a band of Goths as he was pitching camp near the town of Dibaltum (Burgas) on the Black Sea coast. He was commanding an infantry force which included the *Cornuti*, the most senior unit of the *auxilia palatina*. 'Finding himself in imminent danger of destruction he ordered the trumpets to sound, strengthened his flanks, and charged out at the head of his men in full battle order. His brave resistance would have bought him off undefeated, had he not been surrounded by a strong force of cavalry when he was breathless from exhaustion. So he fell after causing the barbarians serious casualties.' (Ammianus Marcellinus)

While the Romans wanted to avoid battle, the Goths sought it out. Having satisfied their immediate needs for food and supplies they now needed a significant military victory to force the Empire to make terms and give them land to settle. They decided, therefore, to try to dislodge Frigeridus' western troops from their fortified position at Beroea. Success would leave them in control of the Hebrus (Maritsa) valley and the Succi (Ihtiman) pass through to Illyricum and the west. Frigeridus did not wait to be attacked but instead withdrew over the Succi pass back to Illyricum. Somewhere along the route he encountered Farnobius' band of Goths and Taifali who had taken advantage of the stripping of Illyricum's defences to cross the Danube and ravage the region. The Romans attacked, killing Farnobius and many of his followers. When their leader fell, the Goths and Taifali gave up. The Romans accepted their surrender and sent them to northern Italy to work as farm labourers.

As the year 377 drew to a close it was clear that only a major expedition by the main imperial armies could hope to dislodge the Goths from their foothold in Thrace. Valens and Gratian agreed,

therefore, to make a joint effort to destroy the Goths. Valens would withdraw as many troops as he could from the Armenian frontier while Gratian would march east from Gaul.

THE ADRIANOPLE CAMPAIGN, AD 378

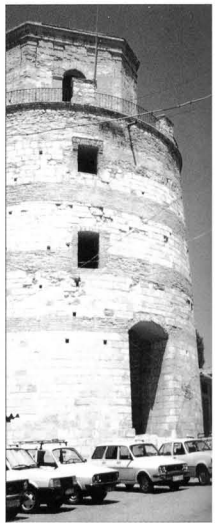
One of the great difficulties for historians without military experience is understanding how the Roman Empire, with arguably 500,000 men under arms, could not raise enough troops to crush the relatively small number of Goths, Huns and Alans who had overrun the Danubian provinces. Surely, two years after the crossing of the Danube, Valens and Gratian between them could have sorted it out?

There were two serious problems that made the task more difficult than appearances suggest. The first was that the number of deployable, high-quality troops was limited. There are modern parallels to this problem. One example is the great difficulty the NATO nations (collectively with several million men under arms) had in finding a mere 50,000 troops to deploy to the Balkans in the 1990s. Even then, about half the troops had to be drawn from non-NATO nations. The Roman field armies were supposedly mobile and deployable but orders to move to a new area of operations resulted in mass desertions. Secondly, all troops were committed on other fronts and there was a very real danger that if a significant number were moved, a potential enemy would take advantage to attack. This is exactly what happened in the first months of AD 378.

A Roman guardsman of Alamannic origin returned to his home across the Rhine in the winter of 377–378 and while there talked indiscreetly about Gratian's plans to lead western troops to the east, to engage the Goths. This intelligence enticed his countrymen (the Lentienses) to launch a number of probing raids across the frozen Rhine in February 378. Although these were beaten back by a brigade of Roman *auxilia palatina* (the *Celtae* and *Petulantes*), they confirmed the fact that much of the western field army had already marched to Illyricum in preparation for operations against the Goths. The Lentienses seized the opportunity to attack in force, crossing the upper Rhine near Argentaria (Colmar). Gratian was forced to recall the units he had sent east, mobilise the troops left in Gaul and call on the Franks for assistance. Although the Lentienses were defeated in a fast-moving campaign that demonstrated Gratian's courage and resourcefulness, the unexpected attack delayed the Western Emperor's plans to aid his uncle against the Goths by several months. It would also have greatly reduced the number of troops he would have been willing to send east.

Equally, even if Valens had been able to come to terms with the Persians in the dispute over Armenia, it was impossible to completely withdraw all the Empire's best troops from the eastern frontier. In the spring of 378 he personally moved from Antioch (which had been his headquarters for operations against Persia) to Constantinople, where he had to deal with an outbreak of popular discontent. This was partly a result of the Catholic population objecting to his Arian faith, no doubt aggravated by the proximity of the Goths and the dismal campaign so far.

Valens did not remain long in the city, preferring to establish his base



LEFT **The walls of Adrianople were strong enough to withstand several assaults by the Goths even though the defenders would have been little more than a local militia. This tower is virtually all that remains now of the Roman defences of Adrianople. (Author's photo)**

BELOW **This version of a typical 4th century 'ridge-style' helmet could have been worn by Goths or Romans. The original probably also had cheek guards. (Germanisches National Museum, Nuremberg)**

RIGHT **This 5th century mosaic of a hunter in Asiatic dress could represent one of the many nomadic steppe peoples such as the Huns or Alans, or he could be a Persian or even a Roman from the eastern frontier. (Mosaic Museum, Istanbul)**

at the imperial estate of Melanthias, about 20kms from the capital. Here he gathered together his forces, while appointing the newly arrived western general Sebastian as *magister militum* to replace Trajan. Sebastian took a body of picked troops to carry on the guerrilla war against the Goths, buying time for the Emperor to marshal his main force. According to Ammianus, Sebastian selected 300 men from each available unit, while Zosimus says the whole force was 2,000 strong – a reasonable number for such special operations.

The Goths, meanwhile, were apparently mainly centred in the river valleys south of the Balkan mountains, around the towns of Dibaltum, Cabyle and Beroea, but bands ranged far and wide over most of the Thracian countryside. As Valens moved to Constantinople at least one band of Goths was operating in the region around Adrianople, but on learning of the approaching imperial forces they withdrew north-west along the Maritsa River towards Beroea 'laden with booty'. Other bands were still north of the Balkans apparently, since Ammianus mentions a fortified Gothic position at Nicopolis which is 90kms due north of Beroea on the other side of the mountains.

Sebastian's Operations

Sebastian, with his picked force, apparently enjoyed greater success in hit-and-run operations against the Goths than his predecessors. Ammianus' account compresses several months of operations into a few days and makes it seem as though Sebastian was leading an advance guard of the main army. However, it is clear that throughout the spring and summer of 378 he and his men were actively engaged chasing down small groups of Gothic raiders and clearing them from the area around Adrianople while Valens and Gratian gathered their forces. The strategy

THE RHINE–DANUBE FRONTIER, AD 378

1. Prompted by rumours that much of the Western field army has marched against the Goths in the east, the Lentienses launch a series of attacks along the upper Rhine.

2. In response to the attacks on the Rhine Gratian is forced to recall those troops he has sent east and mobilise troops in Gaul.

3. The Lentienses are defeated but Gratian's plans to aid his uncle are delayed by several months and the number of men he can send east greatly reduced.

4. In the spring of AD 378 Valens returns from the east and begins to gather his forces near Constantinople.

5. Sebastian, the new *magister militum*, takes a picked force of 2,000 men and renews the guerrilla war against the Goths, with greater success than his predecessors.

6. Frigeridus' force fortifies the Succi Pass to prevent the barbarians breaking out to the north-west.

7. The Goths are mainly concentrated in the river valleys south of the Balkan mountains, around Cabyle, Beroea and Dibaltum, but bands range far and wide over most of Thrace. Concerned by Roman activity Fritigern concentrates his army at Cabyle.

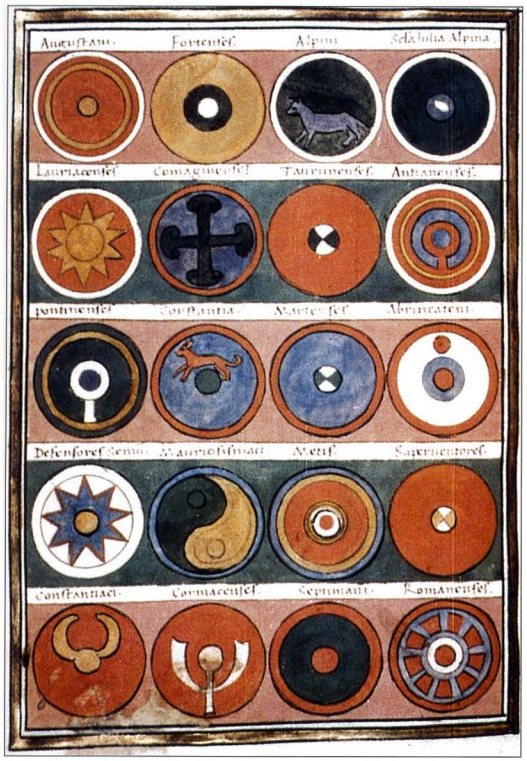
8. Having defeated the Lentienses Gratian sets out for the east with a small body of lightly armed troops. His force is small enough to travel by boat down the Danube.

9. Gratian halts for four days at Sirmium suffering from fever.

10. Gratian's force continues down the Danube to the Camp of Mars where he loses several men in an ambush by a band of Alans.

seemed to be to try to pick off the small bands of raiders one at a time while at the same time containing them in a more closely defined area. To ensure that the Goths did not try to break out to the north-west, Frigeridus' western troops fortified the Succi Pass 'so as to prevent bodies of light-armed marauders spreading at will over the northern provinces.'

A good idea of the kind of campaign being fought in the early months of 378 is provided by Ammianus, when he describes an action in which Sebastian engaged a group of Goths to the north-west of Adrianople: 'Towards evening he suddenly caught sight of some Gothic raiding parties near the Maritsa River. He concealed himself for a while behind dikes and bushes, and then crept forward quietly under cover of night to attack them in their sleep. His success was so complete that all perished except for a few who saved themselves by speed of foot.'



Shield designs of units of *pseudocomitatenses* belonging to the West Roman army. These were units of frontier garrison troops promoted to the field army. Several of these units may have been the 'Transalpine and Pannonian' troops brought from the west by Frigeridus in 377. The third to ninth units represented here are potential candidates (*Alpini*, *Secunda Iulia Alpina*, *Lanciarii Lauriacenses*, *Lanciarii Comaginenses*, *Taurunenses*, *Antianenses*, *Pontinenses*). They were all originally from Alpine or Pannonian frontier regions and many of them ended up in Illyricum. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

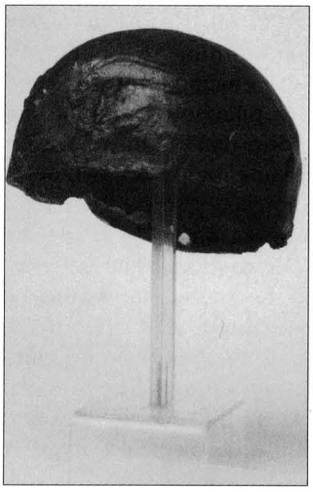
This, and other similar actions, drove home to Fritigern the danger of continuing to operate in small bands which could be engaged and defeated piecemeal while foraging or pillaging. He knew that the two emperors would soon make a move against him and therefore it became more important to concentrate his forces to engage them, rather than keep dispersed for logistical reasons. If he made the first move, he might be able to dictate the terms of the campaign, whereas if he waited he would be caught in a pincer movement and destroyed. Consequently he recalled all his followers and allies to the vicinity of Cabyle 'and then quickly evacuated the area, intending to keep his people in open country where they could not be surprised or suffer from lack of food.'

Meanwhile Gratian, having defeated the Lentienses, was proceeding eastwards. However, not wishing to leave the west undefended, he apparently only had a small body of troops with him rather than an army. Ammianus calls them 'lightly armed' and they were few enough in number to move by boat down the Danube. He stopped for four days at Sirmium (Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia), suffering from fever, then continued on again down the Danube to the 'camp of Mars' (a frontier fortress near modern Kula on the Serbian/Bulgarian border) where he lost several men in an ambush by a force of Alans.

The Romans Advance

By this time Valens' army had been assembled at Melanthias. We do not know much about its composition since very few units are named in the sources. It probably contained a sizeable portion of the eastern praesental army and the *scholae*, although some units would have been left in the east. Several other units had been engaged in the Balkans for much of the previous year and by now would have been seriously depleted. These included the unnamed legions that fought at Ad Salices, the *Cornuti* who were engaged at Dibaltum, some elements of the *scholae*, the 300 men from each unit selected to form Sebastian's force and no doubt others who are not identified. Probably, Valens had between 15,000–20,000 men with him. Ammianus says that it was a varied force, presumably containing a mix of troop types and a high proportion of veterans.

Valens marched from Melanthias towards Adrianople. He would have known that the Goths had been concentrating in the region around Beroea and Cabyle and he probably intended to take the obvious route along the Maritsa River, following the retreating Goths that Sebastian had cut-up as they tried to fall back to Beroea. His intention was probably to move west, past Adrianople, through the Maritsa valley towards Philippopolis, cutting north when he reached the Sazliyka River which runs south from the Balkans about half-way between Beroea and Cabyle. In this area he would be certain to encounter the Goths. Meanwhile



ABOVE **Gothic soldiers equipped themselves with Roman weapons and armour, either taken from the battlefield or from captured armouries. No doubt they would modify this equipment to suit their own tastes and needs as this earlier legionary helmet had been modified by a western German warrior. (Museum Burg Linn, Krefeld)**

ABOVE, RIGHT **Germanic javelin, spear and axe heads. Most Goths would have been armed with very similar weapons. Gothic warriors first showered their opponents with javelins, then fought with spears. A hand axe was often used as a side arm instead of a more expensive sword. There is no record of them throwing axes like the Franks. (Museum Burg Linn, Krefeld)**

Gratian would move through the Succi pass to Philippopolis, and follow the Maritsa in the opposite direction to link up with him.

Unfortunately for the Romans, Fritigern moved first, striking directly south from Cabyle following the Tundzha River towards Adrianople with the intention of getting behind Valens' army and cutting his supply route from Constantinople. Their apparent target was the way station of Nike, about 15 miles from Adrianople on the road to Constantinople (probably near modern Havsa). Ammianus says that Roman reconnaissance found out that the 'enemy intended to intercept our lines of supply with a strong force,' but what happened then is confusing. Valens apparently sent a body of foot archers and a troop (*turma*) of cavalry to 'secure the adjacent passes' and frustrate the Goths' intentions. This seems like a wholly inadequate force to do anything other than watch – especially as a *turma* was only about 30 men! It is also very unclear which route they guarded as it would have been impossible for a small force to watch several passes; probably they were sent up the Tundzha where they would have encountered the Goths moving south.

Valens Decides to Fight

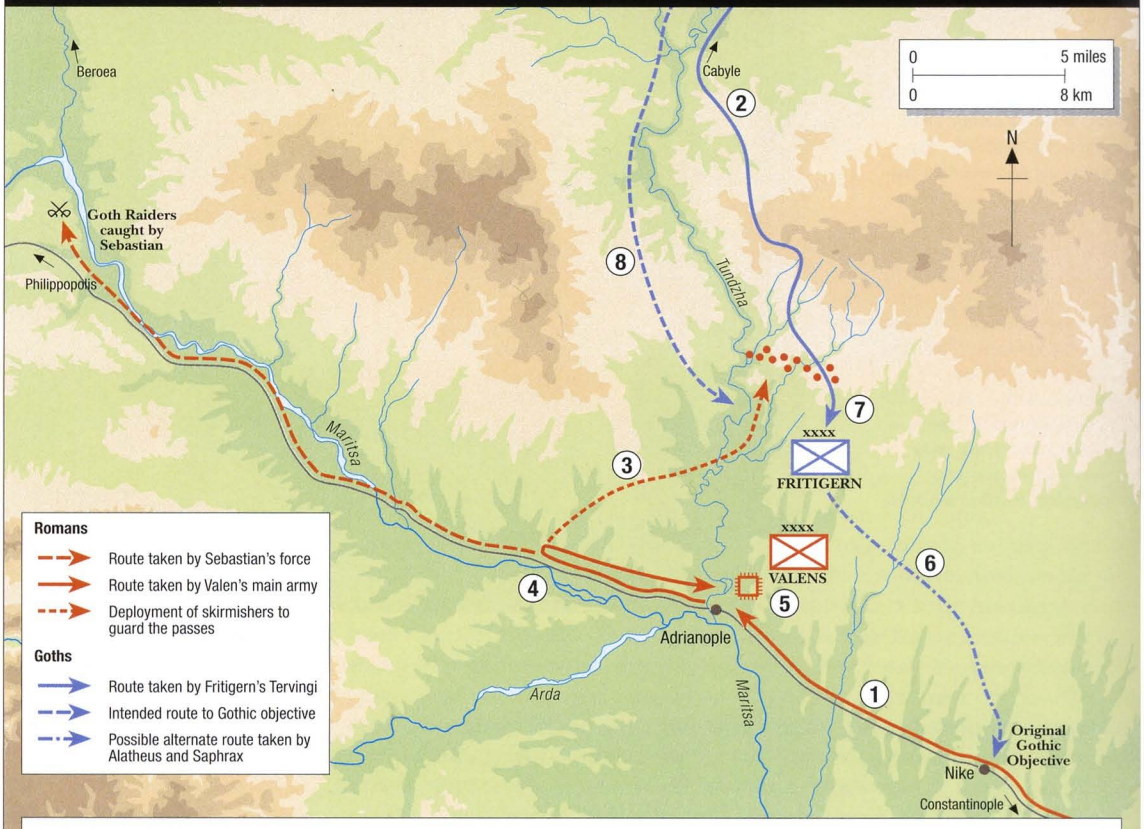
It seems likely that Valens had already marched west from Adrianople heading along the Maritsa valley when news reached him that the Goths were moving south from Cabyle along the Tundzha. Probably he first thought it was only a small raiding party, but he soon realised it was a much larger force and he turned back towards Adrianople, establishing a fortified camp just outside the city. Now he had to make a decision. Should he engage the Goths or wait for Gratian to join him?

A number of factors influenced Valens' decision. Firstly his scouts reported the Gothic force contained only 10,000 fighting men. If Valens had at least 15,000 men, it would be very tempting to offer battle. Valens' political standing in Constantinople was very low at this point, as evidenced by the unrest he had to put down before embarking on this stage of the campaign. If he allowed a large Gothic army to take a position between Adrianople and Constantinople, he would not only find his supply lines cut off but the populace would feel abandoned by their emperor. Finally if he did wait for Gratian, who presumably was

RIGHT **4th century Roman soldiers from the Arch of Constantine. Some historians think that the helmet plume may represent horns, postulating that these could be soldiers of the *Cornuti* (horned ones). They could also be feathers. The *Cornuti* were defeated by the Goths at Dibaltum and the survivors may have fought at Adrianople. (Deutchen Archaologischen Instituts)**

BELOW **The Maritsa River valley was one of the natural routes into south-east Thrace. Sebastian successfully ambushed a band of Goths somewhere along the river between Adrianople and Philippopolis. (Author's photo)**

THE MARCH TO ADRIANOPLE



1. Knowing the Goths to be in the area of Beroea/Cabyle, Valens marches his main army of 15-20,000 men from Melanthius towards Adrianople. The army includes the bulk of the Eastern praesental army and units of *scholae* and a high proportion of his troops are veterans.

2. Fritigern strikes directly south from Cabyle, following the Tundzha River towards Adrianople. He hopes to get behind Valens' army and cut his supply lines to Constantinople.

3. Roman reconnaissance detects the Goths moving down the Tundzha valley and a small force is sent to watch the passes.

4. Valens' army is already west of Adrianople when the Goths are detected. It is probable that at first they were thought to be nothing more than a raiding party. When the size of the Gothic force becomes clear Valens turns back towards Adrianople.

5. Having established a fortified camp outside Adrianople, Valens decides to attack the supposedly weaker Goth force.

6. The Goths had originally intended to bypass Adrianople to the north and head for the way-station at Nike.

7. Valens is not to the west further up the Maritsa valley but encamped outside Adrianople. With their wagons and families the Goths are vulnerable to attack on the move. Fritigern therefore establishes a camp, probably in the area of the modern village of Muratçali.

8. Roman scouts fail to detect the Greuthungi and Alan cavalry foraging further up the Tundzha valley.

only bringing a very small number of troops with him, Valens would have to share the glory, in exchange for only a limited amount of actual military support. With hindsight it is easy to fault Valens' decision to attack, but looking at the situation through Valens' eyes with the information he had at the time, it becomes clearer why he did what he did.

Ammianus says that the Goths moved slowly over the next three days. Encumbered by wagons and a train of non-combatants, this is probably the time it took them to negotiate the difficult road along the east bank of the Tundzha before emerging into the more open ground about 20 kilometres north of Adrianople. It is possible that the Greuthungi and Alans were approaching the rendezvous from a different route, possibly along the west bank of the Tundzha which is easily fordable in several places.

ABOVE **This 4th century Roman infantryman is typically armed with a sword and pair of javelins. His defensive equipment consists of a crested helmet, oval shield and wrist-length mail shirt. (Via Latina Catacomb, Rome)**

RIGHT **4th century infantry and cavalry operating together from the Arch of Constantine. Such co-operation did not happen at Adrianople. The cavalry fled the field, leaving the infantry unsupported. (Deutchen Archaologischen Instituts)**

The Goths had intended to head for Nike, bypassing Adrianople to the north, and then cut the road running south-east towards Constantinople. This plan presumed that Valens would have been further to the west, rather than occupying a fortified position outside Adrianople. Valens could no longer be bypassed and the Goths on the move with their wagons and families would have been very vulnerable to attack. Fritigern now had to either find a good position to fight from, or withdraw back to the north. If he delayed too long there was a risk that Valens would be reinforced and become too strong to defeat in battle.

This leads to the matter of how many men Fritigern actually had. Valens' scouts reported the force as 10,000 fighting men, which Ammianus says was erroneous, but unfortunately he does not say by how much. Numbers as high as 200,000 men are quoted by some historians but even the most incompetent of scouts could not mistake 200,000 men

Unlike many contemporary monuments which show unarmoured troops, the arch of Galerius shows early 4th century soldiers in full battle order. These men wearing scale armour, conical segmented helmets with nose, cheek and neck guards (spangenhelm) and carrying large shields could be either cavalry or infantry. Many of the Goths and Romans in the Adrianople campaign would have been similarly equipped. (Deutchen Archaologischen Instituts)

for 10,000. It seems more likely that Fritigern probably had something like 10,000 men, maybe a few thousand more, directly with him, but that some other bands, such as Alatheus' and Saphrax's Greuthungi and Alans, were close by but not in the immediate vicinity and therefore were missed by the Roman scouts. Had the Goths vastly outnumbered the Romans, it would have been noticed as the armies were deploying and some officers would have urged a withdrawal. However there is no indication that this happened, and although Valens was blamed by his contemporaries for attacking rashly and not waiting for Gratian, there is no indication that the Goths had an overwhelming numerical superiority. Had this been the case it would have been immediately seized on by the Romans to explain the defeat.

However many Goths there were, Valens believed they numbered 10,000, and he called a council of war to decide the next move. Sebastian and a number of like-minded officers urged him to attack at once. No doubt they were influenced by their recent success on the Maritsa and felt that victory was within their grasp. Others, led by Victor, the *magister equitum*, whom Ammianus says 'though a Sarmatian, was a prudent and cautious man', argued that they should wait for Gratian's reinforcements. This view was shared by Richomeres who had just arrived at Adrianople, in advance of the western reinforcements, carrying a letter from the Western Emperor, urging Valens to 'wait a short time till Gratian arrived to share the danger, and not rashly commit himself to the risks of a decisive action single handed.'

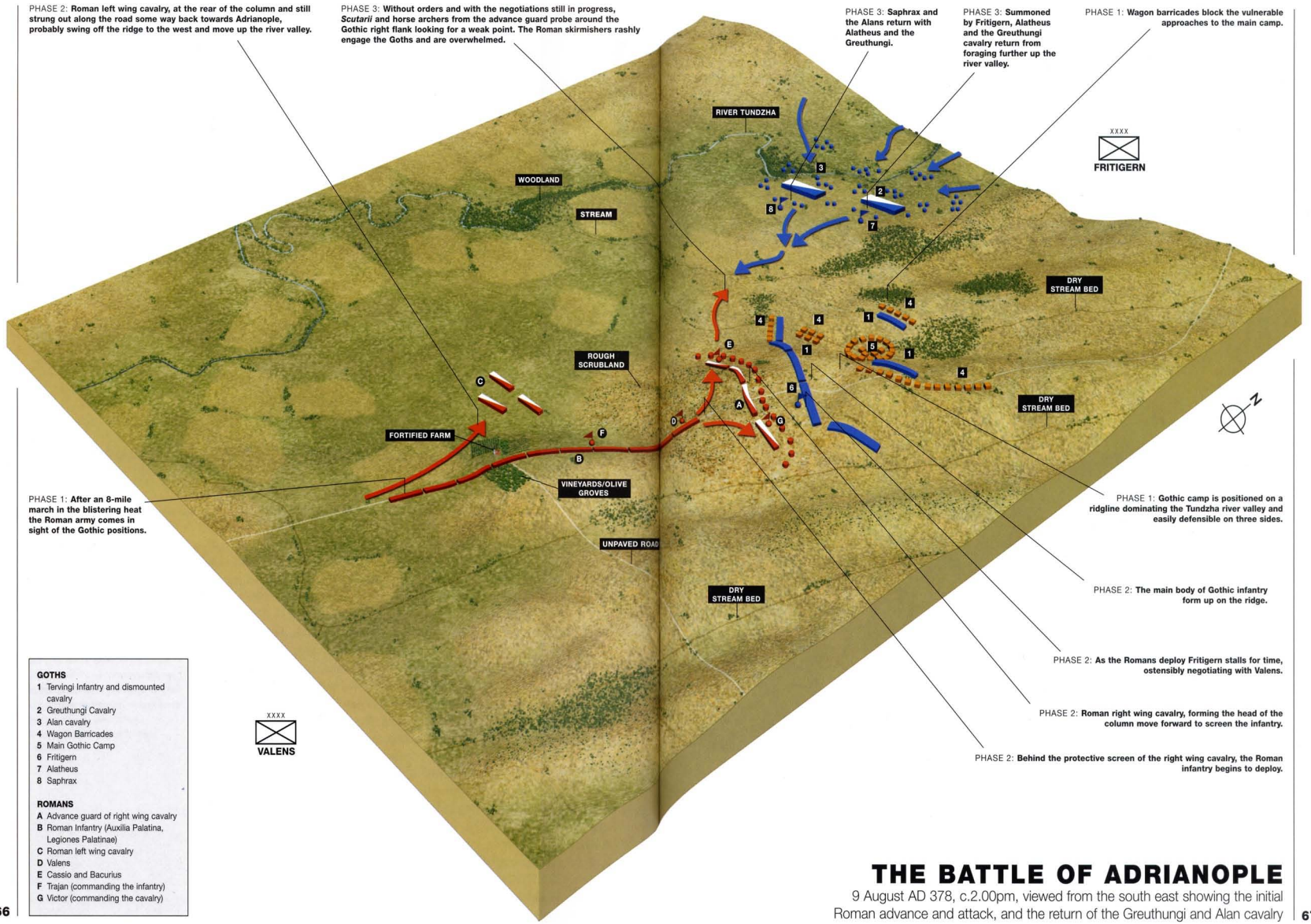
Conventional cavalry, supported by horse archers, destroy the Praetorian Guard at the Battle of Milvian Bridge. A similar combination of spear and bow armed cavalry opened the battle of Adrianople. (Deutchen Archaologischen Instituts)

The fact that the issue was debated at all indicates that, if Valens believed the Goths numbered 10,000 men, his army cannot have been substantially larger. If the estimate of 15,000–20,000 Romans is correct, then it was probably on the lower side, since if Valens thought he had odds of 2:1 in his favour, he probably would not have hesitated. If he had 15,000 to the Goths' supposed 10,000 he needed to weigh the advantage Gratian's reinforcements would give him against the disadvantage of sharing the credit. In the end, 'the fatal obstinacy of the emperor and the flattery of some of his courtiers prevailed. They urged immediate action to prevent Gratian sharing in a victory which in their opinion was already as good as won.'

As the council concluded and the Romans began to prepare for battle, Fritigern sent a Christian priest to the Roman camp with an offer of terms. He asked for the reinstatement of the original agreement made at the time of their crossing of the Danube two years earlier: land to settle in Thrace, in return for perpetual peace. Fritigern also sent a private note to Valens in which he hinted that he really wanted peace and that all Valens needed to do was make a show of force to cower the Goths, after which Fritigern would be able to persuade them to come to terms. Probably Fritigern believed he could defeat the Romans and hoped to draw Valens out rather than risk being besieged in his camp when hunger and disease would have been even deadlier enemies.

The Opening Moves

In any event, the peace overtures were rejected and at dawn on 9 August AD 378, Valens left his baggage, the imperial treasury and his civilian councillors inside the city 'with a suitable guard of legions,' and marched from Adrianople at the head of the rest of his army. The day was



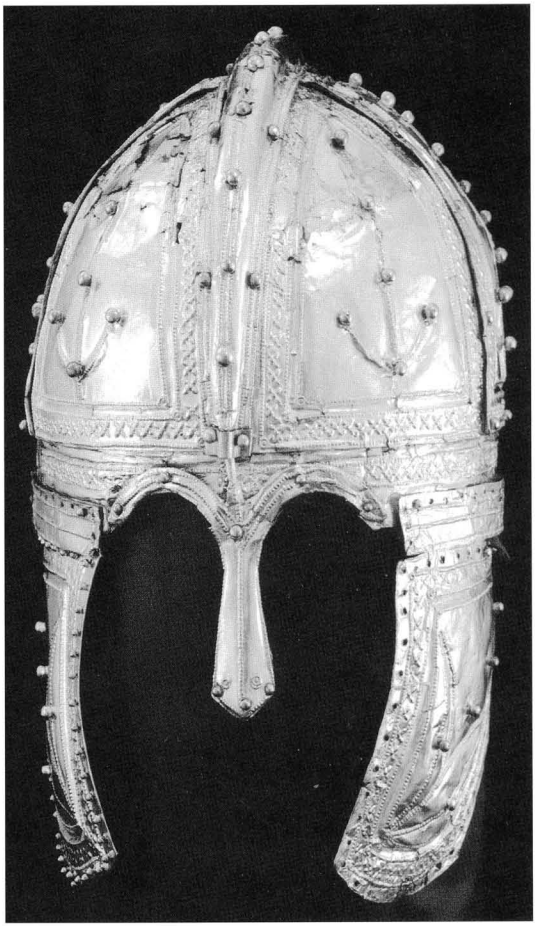
THE BATTLE OF ADRIANOPLE

9 August AD 378, c.2.00pm, viewed from the south east showing the initial Roman advance and attack, and the return of the Greuthungi and Alan cavalry

LEFT **A late Roman mosaic depicting an armoured man on an armoured horse. Heavily armoured cataphracts formed a large part of the 4th century East Roman army and were probably present at Adrianople. (Bernd Lehnhoff)**

RIGHT **A gilded silver helmet belonging to a soldier of the Equites Stablesiani from around AD 320. Helmets like this could have been worn by wealthy or successful soldiers in both Gothic and Roman armies. (Rijksmuseum van Oudhenden, Leiden)**

ABOVE **This 4th century relief shows an armoured horseman, probably an officer, wearing a metal cuirass moulded to represent muscles. It is worn over a leather undergarment with hanging strips (*pteruges*) to protect the thighs and upper arms. (Archaeological Museum, Istanbul)**

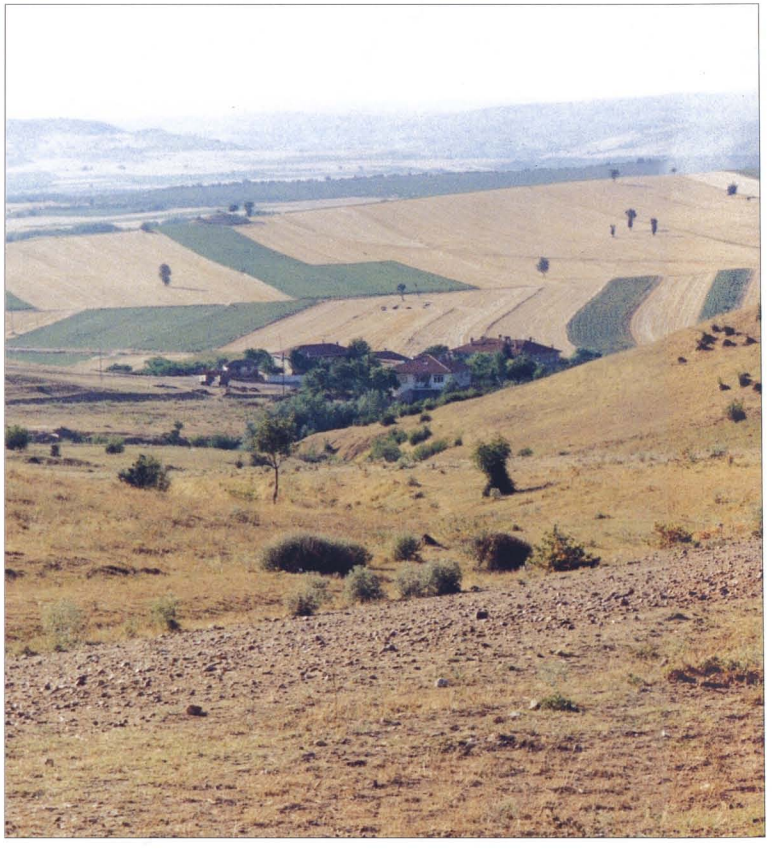


blisteringly hot and the terrain was rough and hilly. After a march of 8 miles (13kms) the Romans came in sight of the Gothic position which was probably along a dominating ridge immediately south of the modern hamlet of Muratçali which is 16kms north of the centre of Adrianople and 5kms east of the Tundzha River. The actual Gothic camp was probably centred on Muratçali which has a small stream running through it and is well protected by high ridges on three sides.

This location of the Gothic camp is not certain. The only other battlefield analysis was done by F. Runkel (*Die Schlacht bei Adrianople*, Berlin 1903) in which he identifies the ridge at Demirhanli (which he calls Demeranliga) as the location of the Gothic position. This is exactly the same distance from Adrianople as Muratçali but to the east rather than the north. Such a location presumes the Goths made further progress towards Nike. While the Demirhanli ridge provides a good defensive position to attack from the west, it would be easily outflanked to the south (where the main Roman road lay) and more importantly it has no water source behind the ridge for the encamped Goths to use. The ravines are also more open with a much smaller chance of the Gothic cavalry escaping detection. In contrast the Muratçali site offers a watered, protected camp location easily defensible on three sides and close to the Tundzha for forage and ample water. The shape of the ridge and its gullies also makes it easy to lose sight of troops if to the south, as the Romans were, but the high points of the ridge, where the Goths were positioned, offer clear views in all directions.

Although contemporary accounts constantly refer to the Romans encountering a circle of wagons (not only here but also at Ad Salices), it would be wrong to think that they would have been formed in a single large circle. The Goths were a whole people on the move, and even if some families and baggage had been left behind at Cabyle, it is quite likely that there were at least 30,000 people including women, children, invalids, captives and slaves with probably about 2,000–5,000 wagons. Even at the lower estimate, this would have resulted in a line of wagons about 15 kilometres long in single file (a full day's march) which, if drawn into a circle, even when the animals were released and brought into the middle, would have resulted in a massive 2–3km diameter circle that would have taken an entire day to form. It is much more likely that clan and family groupings formed several smaller groupings of a few wagons close to the water supply while some wagons would have been used as a barricade to guard the vulnerable approaches to the main camp area.

At about 2.00pm the Romans began to deploy. The right-wing cavalry formed the head of the column and moved forward to screen the deployment while the infantry began to form up behind them, facing the Goths, in their customary two lines. The left-wing cavalry, forming



LEFT **The little hamlet of Muratçali nestled behind a high dominating ridgeline is probably where the Goths had their camp. It had a water source and could be easily defended. Some wagons may have been used to block the more vulnerable approaches but the Goths would have formed their main defensive line on the ridge from where the photo was taken. (Author's photo)**

BELOW **The view looking south from the centre of the Tervingi position along the route of the Roman approach. The ground drops away rapidly to the east, which would have hidden the Gothic cavalry from the advancing Romans. (Author's photo)**

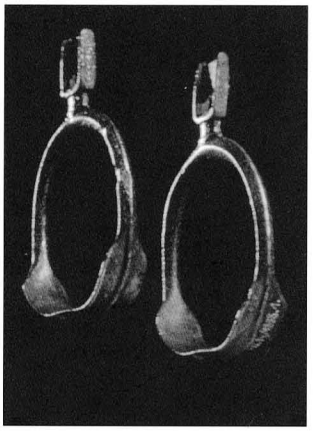
the rear of the march column, were strung out along the road a long way back and hastened to move up, probably swinging off the ridge to the west to move up the relatively flat ground of the wide Tundzha valley.

It is often assumed that the Goths remained inside their wagon laager and fought from behind the barricade, but this is highly unlikely. Usual practice was to engage the enemy in the open and only fall back on the camp if defeated. Had the Goths remained behind the wagons they would have not only surrendered initiative to the Romans but they would have been unable to use their preferred tactic of charging into hand-to-hand combat and engaging the enemy with spears, swords and shields. It is far more likely that the Goths formed up on the dominating ridge just south of Muratçali while the majority of the wagons were tucked away behind the ridge.

It is also clear from the descriptions of the battle by Ammianus that the conflict took place in the open, not amongst the wagons. In fact on one occasion he says that one part of the Roman line managed to fight its way forward as far as the wagons, clearly indicating that the fighting took place outside the wagon laager. This occurred on the Gothic right flank where the wagons were probably used to block the open approach to the camp from the Tundzha valley.

As the Romans began to deploy, Fritigern played for time. Although he had sent out a summons for all his troops to converge, not all of his forces were in the immediate vicinity. In particular, the Greuthungi and Alans, who were foraging along the Tundzha further north, had not yet joined up. Therefore, he again sent envoys to Valens ostensibly to try to negotiate peace but in reality to buy time. According to Ammianus: 'The enemy deliberately wasted time so that their own cavalry, which was expected at any moment, might have a chance to get back while this sham armistice lasted, and also to ensure that our men, who were already exhausted by the summer heat should be parched with thirst. With this in view they fired the countryside over a wide area, feeding the flames with wood and other dry material. A further fatal circumstance was that both men and beasts were tormented by severe hunger.'

Negotiations went back and forth, hung up on technicalities and protocol. At first the Romans rejected the Gothic envoys as being too lowly in rank. Then Fritigern offered to negotiate in person if some high-ranking Romans were sent as hostages. Valens proposed sending his kinsman, the Tribune Equitus, but Equitus objected on the grounds that he had



ABOVE **Avar stirrups. Some modern historians claim the Gothic cavalry were so successful at Adrianople because they rode with stirrups. This is not true. Stirrups like these were first introduced to the west by the Avars in the 7th century. (Hungarian National Museum)**

RIGHT **A mosaic of an armoured soldier from the Imperial Palace in Constantinople. He is wearing a metallic cuirass with a kilt of white *pteruges* (strips of linen or leather) protecting his thighs. His sword is suspended on the left side from a baldric of red leather and he wears black gaiters tied with yellow or gold bindings. (Mosaic Museum, Istanbul)**

previously escaped as a prisoner of war from Dibaltum and he feared the Goths would take revenge on him. Eventually Richomeres volunteered to go.

Fritigern's motivation here is obvious. He needed time for Alatheus and Saphrax to join him. But why Valens allowed these negotiations to go on is much less clear. If he had wanted a negotiated settlement he had the chance when the Gothic envoys first came to him back at Adrianople, but he had sent them away. Perhaps having seen the Gothic position, he was now less sure of victory. Perhaps too he realised that he did not have quite the superiority of numbers that he had counted on and therefore he was looking for a negotiated way out of battle, or perhaps to put off an engagement until Gratian could join him. Whatever the case, before Richomeres reached the Gothic camp on his diplomatic mission, the decision was taken out of Valens' hands by his subordinates.

ABOVE **The insignia of the *Comites Sacrarum Largitionum*, who were responsible for the imperial finances. Valens brought his treasury with him, leaving it with his civilian officials in the city of Adrianople. After the battle the Goths tried in vain to capture it. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)**

Battle is Joined

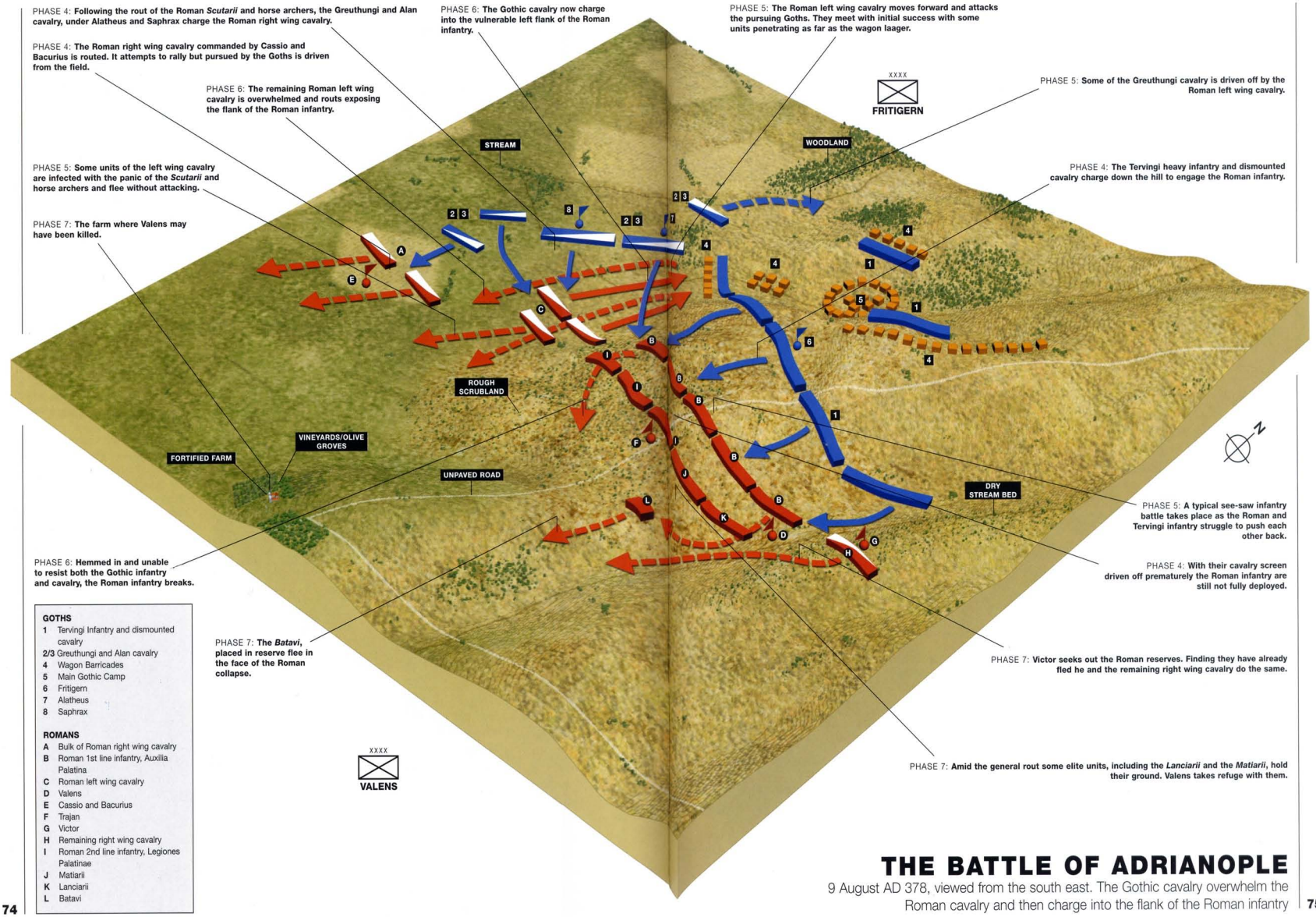
The Roman skirmishers from the right wing, who were screening the deployment and keeping an eye on enemy movements, became engaged. What exactly happened is unclear. Ammianus says that a force of archers and *Scutarii*, commanded by Cassio and Bacurius, 'impulsively launched a hot attack and engaged the enemy.' The *Scutarii* were probably one of the elite cavalry units of the *scholae*. The archers could have been either mounted or on foot, Ammianus does not specify. Since in an earlier incident he specifically mentions 'foot archers,' his lack of precision here probably indicates they were a unit of horse archers.

It is highly unlikely that these troops launched an attack on the wagon laager. It is more likely that they were probing around to the left, looking for a weak point in the enemy defences and trying to see what lay beyond the ridge-line, which blocked all view to the west. Possibly they intercepted some other bands of Goths moving up to reinforce Fritigern's position, probably the scouts from the Greuthungi and Alans.

The job of skirmishers is to act as the eyes and ears of the army, keeping a watch on the enemy and preventing him from interfering with their own army's movements. They fight from a distance with missile weapons, using hit-and-run tactics. If they become embroiled in hand-to-hand fighting they will inevitably be destroyed. The Roman skirmishers in this case somehow got involved in more than they could handle. Possibly they only saw a few of the enemy and thought that they had a chance to inflict some real damage, but then the Goths threw in reinforcements that turned the tide. It might also have been arrogance on the part of the *Scutarii*, who, as an elite, well-equipped cavalry unit, may have felt that they could defeat the enemy face-to-face.

Whatever caused the engagement, the result was predictable: 'their retreat was as cowardly as their advance had been rash,' says Ammianus. To make matters worse the retreating Roman cavalry 'brought on an attack by the Gothic cavalry under Alatheus and Saphrax, who had now arrived supported by a party of Alans. They shot forward like a bolt from on high and routed with great slaughter all that they could come to grips with in their wild career.'

As the Greuthungi and Alans chased off the Roman right-wing cavalry, the Tervingi launched an attack all along the line while the Romans were not yet fully deployed. The cavalry of the left wing was still



THE BATTLE OF ADRIANOPLE

9 August AD 378, viewed from the south east. The Gothic cavalry overwhelm the Roman cavalry and then charge into the flank of the Roman infantry

A gold coin with the bust of Valens on one side and a representation of him in a victorious pose on the other. This probably commemorates his earlier victories over the Goths in the early part of his reign. (Archaeological Museum, Istanbul)

not in position and they were struggling to move off to the left, down the steep hillside. It is also quite possible that some of the infantry were also not yet fully in position.

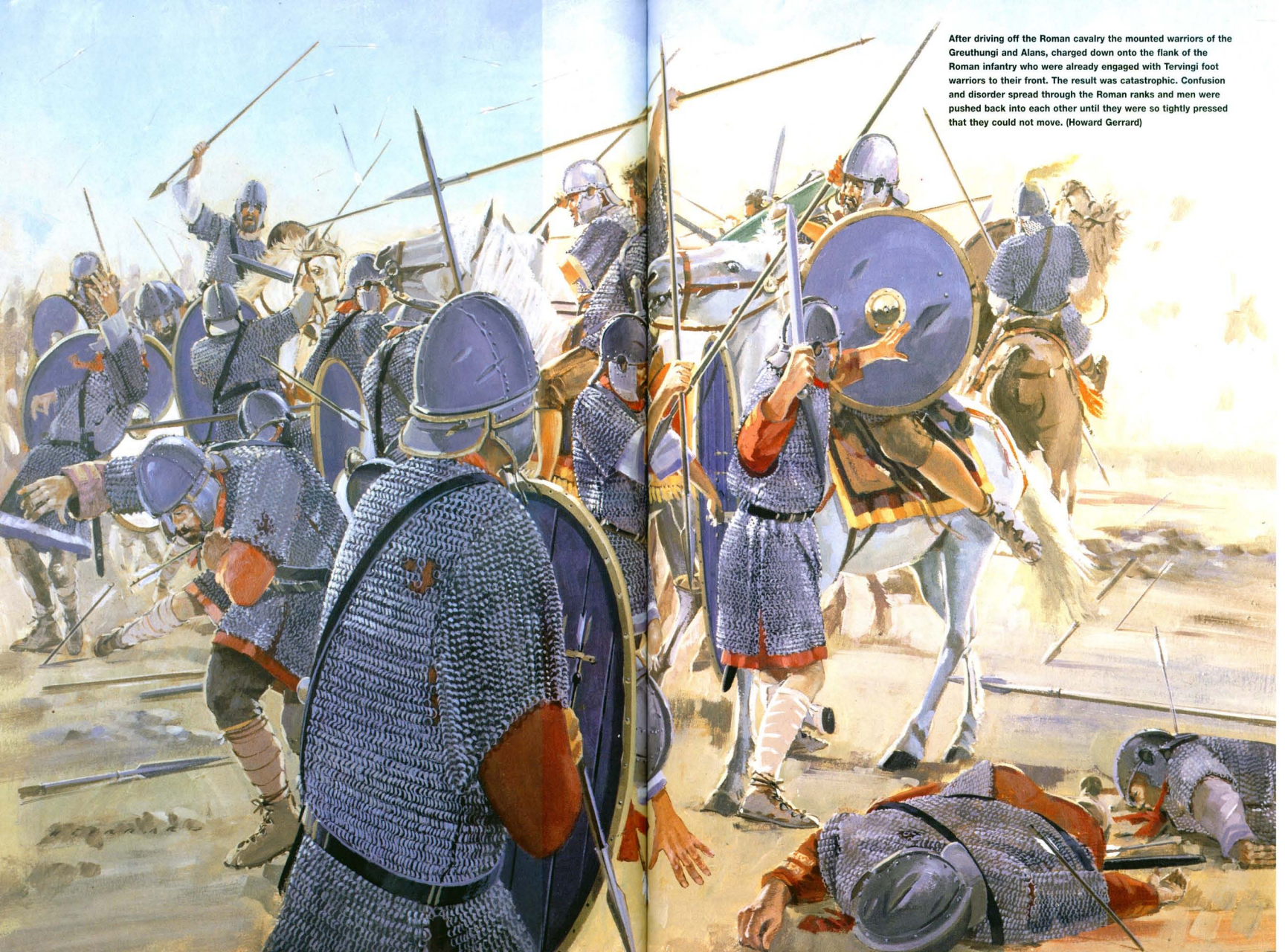
Ammianus provides a colourful account of what happened next: 'Our retreating troops rallied with shouts of mutual encouragement. But, as the fighting spread like fire and numbers of them were transfixed by arrows and whirling javelins, they lost heart. Then the opposing lines came into collision like ships of war and pushed each other to and fro … Our left wing penetrated as far as the very wagons and would have gone further if it had received any support, but it was abandoned by the rest of the cavalry, and under pressure of numbers gave way and collapsed like a broken dike. This left the infantry unprotected and so closely huddled that a man could hardly wield his sword or draw back his arm once he had stretched it out.'

Probably what happened is that the retreating Roman right-wing cavalry rallied briefly but were hard pressed by the Gothic and Alan cavalry and chased from the field. They fled back past the Roman left-wing cavalry who were trying to move forward and deploy. The lead elements of the left wing probably engaged the pursuing Gothic cavalry

BELOW **This 3rd–4th century gravestone shows a nobleman with his armed retainers. The smaller figure represents a slave. (Archaeological Museum, Istanbul)**

This 6th century mosaic from Argos, Greece, depicts a typical East Roman officer wearing a moulded iron cuirass with leather strips protecting his thighs and shoulders. His long sleeved tunic is red which seems to have been the favourite military colour. Like most Roman soldiers in hot climates he does not wear trousers. (Author's photo)

and had some initial success, driving them back to the wagon laager. This success was no doubt a result of catching the pursuers in a state of disorder. The rearmost units of the Roman cavalry, however, were infected with the panic brought on by the routing *Scutarii* and horse archers and, rather than supporting the lead units, turned and fled as well. As this was going on, Fritigern's main body charged down the hillside on foot, to engage the Roman infantry. This resulted in the typical see-saw action that occurred when two battle lines collided and each side tried to push the other back. Meanwhile, however, the handful of Roman cavalry on the left wing were overwhelmed by the Goths and Alans and were routed. This exposed the left flank of the Roman infantry line and the Gothic cavalry charged into this open flank.



After driving off the Roman cavalry the mounted warriors of the Greuthungi and Alans, charged down onto the flank of the Roman infantry who were already engaged with Tervingi foot warriors to their front. The result was catastrophic. Confusion and disorder spread through the Roman ranks and men were pushed back into each other until they were so tightly pressed that they could not move. (Howard Gerrard)

The Last Stand

The Roman infantry, now abandoned by the cavalry, were being pressed together from all sides. Ammianus' description of the confusion brings the battle to life in a way that reflects the author's own experiences of warfare: 'Dust rose in such clouds as to hide the sky, which rang with fearful shouts. In consequence it was impossible to see the enemy's missiles in flight and dodge them; all found their mark and dealt death on every side. The barbarians poured on in huge columns, trampling down horse and man and crushing our ranks so as to make orderly retreat impossible ...

'In this scene of total confusion the infantry, worn out by toil and danger, had no strength left to form a plan. Most had their spears shattered in the constant collisions ... The ground was so drenched with blood that they slipped and fell ... some perished at the hands of their own comrades ... The sun, which was high in the sky scorched the Romans, who were weak from hunger, parched with thirst, and weighed down by the burden of their armour. Finally our line gave way under the overpowering pressure of the barbarians, and as a last resort our men took to their heels in a general rout.'

While many of those who could fled the scene, some elite units held their ground. Two of the army's senior *legiones palatina*, the *Lanciarii* and the *Matiarii*, held firm, unshaken in the midst of the confusion. Valens, apparently on foot and abandoned by most of his bodyguard, managed to make his way over to them and from the temporary refuge of their ranks, he ordered Trajan and Victor to bring up the reserves. But the reserves were no longer there. Victor sought out the *Batavi*, who had been placed in reserve nearby, but they had already fled. Victor did the same, as did Richomeres and Saturninus, leaving the Emperor to his fate.

There are two stories of Valens' death. The first is that he was killed by an arrow and fell amongst the ranks of the few remaining soldiers of the *Lanciarii* and *Matiarii* and his body was never found. The other is that, although wounded by the arrow, he did not die immediately, but was taken by his guards and some eunuchs to a nearby farm house which had a fortified second storey. The house was attacked by the Goths who did not know that the Emperor was inside. The defenders managed initially to drive back the Goths with archery but they returned and piled up brushwood and straw against the house and set fire to it. One man jumped from a window and was taken prisoner by the Goths but the others, including Valens, died in the blaze. The prisoner later escaped and told the story.

Ammianus says that two thirds of the Roman army died at Adrianople. Amongst them were Trajan and Sebastian as well as 35 tribunes. Ammianus compares the slaughter to Cannae and the comparison is apt because in both battles the Roman cavalry were driven from the field leaving the infantry to be hemmed in on all sides and destroyed.

AFTERMATH AND CONSEQUENCES

'When dark night covered the earth after the fatal battle, the survivors scattered to right and left in whatever direction panic took them ... At a distance could be heard the pathetic cries of those left behind, the sobs of the dying and the agonised groans of the wounded.'
(Ammianus Marcellinus)

The next morning the Goths made for Adrianople where they learned from deserters that Valens had left the imperial insignia and treasury. They laid siege to the city and tried vainly to storm the walls. Large numbers of Romans deserted to the Goths, including several *candidati* – members of the Emperor's inner bodyguard – and Fritigern tried to use them to gain entry by treachery. When this also failed, the Goths abandoned the siege and, together with Huns, Alans and Roman deserters, moved on to devastate the fertile Thracian lowlands around Perinthus (Marmara Ereglisi, Turkey).

Eventually they decided to try to besiege Constantinople. However, they realised that the task was impossible when, according to Ammianus, 'they contemplated the long circuit of the walls ... and the strait nearby which separates the Black Sea from the Aegean.' Furthermore they took casualties from an unexpected sally by some Arab mercenaries who were defending the city. This particularly colourful incident is described in detail by Ammianus:

This 9th century illustration shows the Emperor Constantine and his inner guardsmen, the *candidati*. They are dressed all in white with gold and red tunic decorations. Their shields are plain red with a decorated blue border. After Adrianople several of Valens' *candidati* deserted to the Goths. (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris)

The Last Stand. As his army fled, Valens sought refuge amongst the ranks of the *Lanciarii* and *Matiarii* who stood firm despite the carnage around them. The situation, however, was hopeless and Valens perished along with most of the men from these two veteran units. After the slaughter at Adrianople the Roman army would never be the same again. (Howard Gerrard)

Detail from the base of the Obelisk of Theodosius I in Istanbul. The men in the rear row are soldiers, probably Goths recruited after the treaty of 382. Their long hair sets them apart from the Romans in front. (Author's photo)

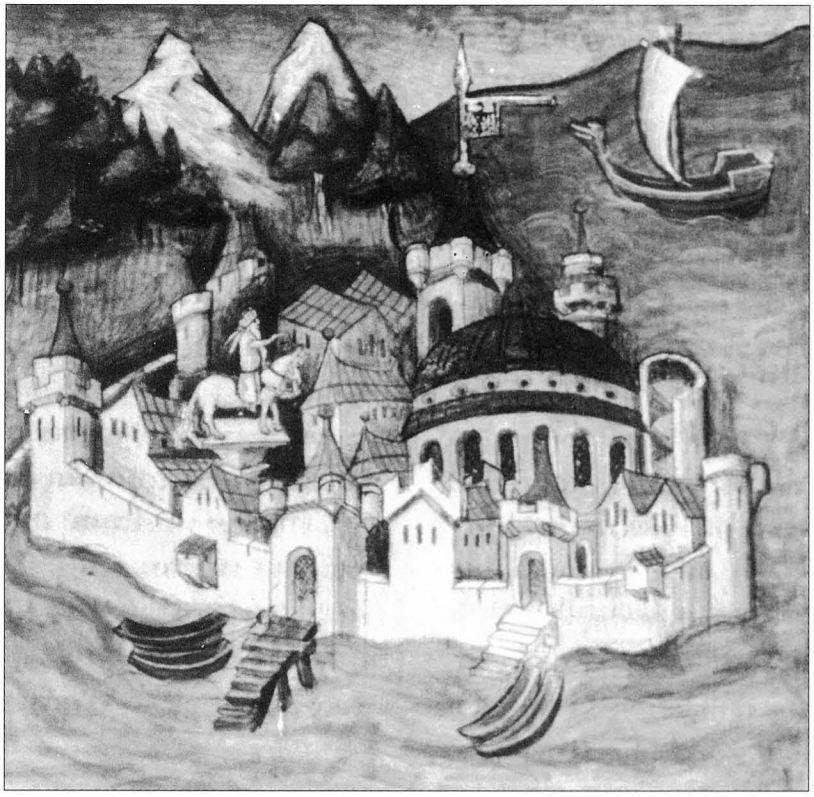
'A body of Saracens ... had been summoned to the city. They are more at home in the tricks of guerrilla warfare than in formal battle, but on the sudden appearance of the host of barbarians [Goths] *they made a bold sally from the city to attack it. After a long and obstinate fight they parted on equal terms. But an incident of an utterly unheard of sort gave the warriors from the East the upper hand. One of them, a man with long hair wearing nothing but a loin cloth, drew his dagger and hurled himself with blood curdling yells into the midst of the Gothic host. He cut a man's throat, then put his lips to the wound and sucked the streaming blood. This appalling sight terrified the barbarians, who lost their habitual confidence and advanced only with hesitation.'*

Food shortages drove the Goths back into Thrace, Illyricum and Dacia. Meanwhile Gratian withdrew back to the west, abandoning the campaign in the Balkans. In January 379 he appointed Theodosius as the Eastern Emperor and responsibility for the conduct of the war passed to him. Meanwhile in the east, Roman commanders, fearing further rebellions, massacred all Gothic soldiers serving in the Roman army.

The war dragged on for another four years, with the Goths unable to take any significant towns or cities and the Romans unable to defeat them in battle. Theodosius gathered new troops from Egypt and Syria as well as recruiting from barbarian tribes north of the Danube. Modares, a Goth in Roman service who had escaped the massacre and yet remained loyal, led some successful counter-attacks, driving his former countrymen into Illyricum, where once again they split into smaller bands. Alatheus and Saphrax apparently struck north into Pannonia but were checked by Gratian, while Fritigern successfully attacked Theodosius' army in Macedonia, driving the East Romans back to Constantinople.

An illustration of Constantinople from the *Notitia Dignitatum*. This 4th–5th century list of military and civilian officials is a valuable source of information on the later Roman army. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

ABOVE **The seal of Alaric, who led the descendants of the Gothic victors at Adrianople. He and his followers sacked Rome in 410 (Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)**

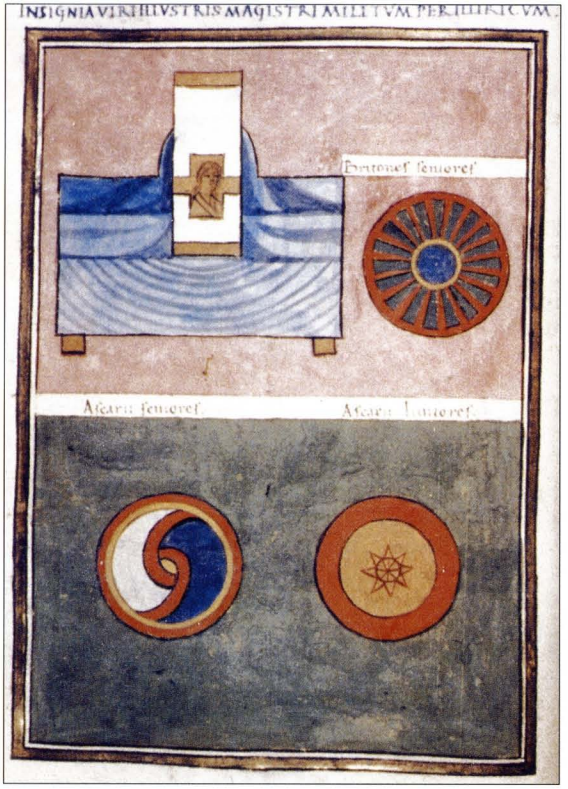


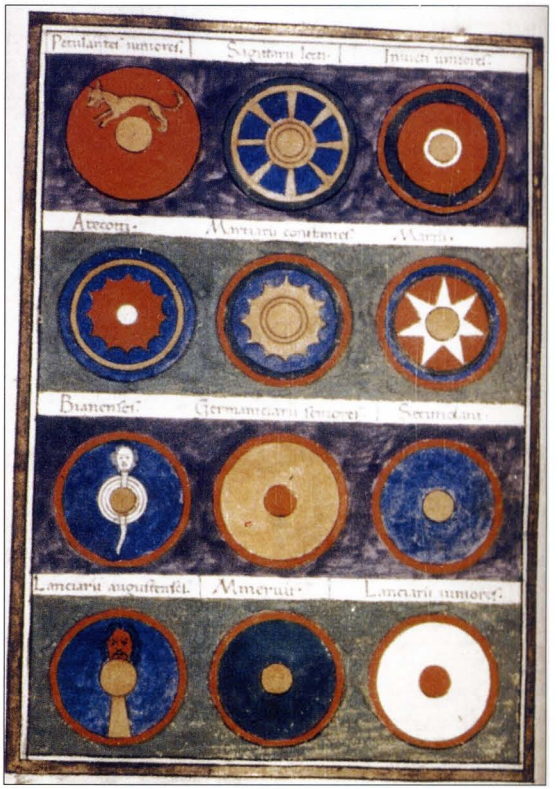
With neither side able to make significant headway against the other, the Goths and Romans turned to negotiations to try to come to terms. Finally on 3 October 382 a treaty was signed, essentially re-affirming the original terms of 376. Fritigern's followers were given land to settle along the southern bank of the Danube in Thrace. In return for the land, and autonomous status within the Empire they were to provide troops to serve in the Roman army and a large number did so in Theodosius' campaign in 387 against the usurper Maximus. Pacatus, in a panegyric to the Emperor Theodosius, describes the mobilisation:

'You [Theodosius] *granted the privileged status of fellow soldiers to the barbarian peoples who promised to give you voluntary service, both to remove from the frontier a force of dubious loyalty and to add reinforcements to your army. They followed the standards which they once opposed. There marched under Roman leaders and banners the onetime enemies of Rome, and they filled with soldiers the cities of Pannonia which they had not long ago emptied by hostile plundering. The Goth, the Hun and the Alan responded to their names ...'*

Barbarians had long been employed in Roman armies and there was a history of settling prisoners of war as military colonists. But the treaty of 382 was different in that an entire people were settled inside the Empire, remaining under their own laws and fighting as a single entity under their own leaders.

Peace did not last long. After playing a leading role in Theodosius' victory over the usurpers Maximus and Eugenius, the Goths again revolted.





The insignia of the *Magister Militum per Illyricum*, commander of the eastern regional field army in Illyricum at the time the appointment was given to Alaric. This army was probably formed after Adrianople but many of the units may have been brought earlier to the region from other parts of the Empire for the Gothic campaign. (*Notitia Dignitatum*, Bodleian Library, Oxford)

Quite probably the revolt was sparked by heavy Gothic casualties in these campaigns leading to a desire on the part of the Goths to have greater control over their own destiny.

Led by Alaric the Goths overran Greece and Illyricum and engaged in a long period of hostility which alternated between open warfare and uneasy truce. The aim of Alaric and his followers was not to establish an independent kingdom, but rather to secure a major military command within the Empire. For a period it appears that Alaric was formally granted the position of *Magister Militum per Illyricum* by Arcadius, who succeeded Theodosius as the Eastern Emperor in 395. Using this mandate he waged war against the western armies commanded by Stilicho, and led an abortive invasion of Italy. Later he reversed his loyalty and held Illyricum on behalf of the Western Emperor. The full history of the descendants of the Goths, Huns and Alans who crossed the Danube in 376 cannot be told here. But in 409 they invaded Italy a second time and sacked Rome in 410. Finally, eight years later they formally established the Visigothic Kingdom in southern France, later spreading into Spain.

The Reasons for the Roman Defeat

How was it that the best organised, equipped and disciplined army in the world could have been so thoroughly defeated by what amounted to an ad hoc force of refugees and deserters? Various explanations have been offered over the years to explain away the improbable. Some claim that the Goths had a huge numerical superiority, quoting numbers as high as 200,000 when in fact they would have been lucky to have had a tenth of

THE AFTERMATH OF ADRIANOPLE, AD 382–418

1. The Goths, led by Alaric, revolt after suffering heavy casualties fighting for the Emperor Theodosius against a series of usurpers. The revolt is triggered by Theodosius' death and Alaric seeks a formal military command in the Imperial army.

2. Roman forces are unable to defeat Alaric and he is given control of the Balkans as Magister Militum per Illyricum on behalf of the Eastern Emperor.

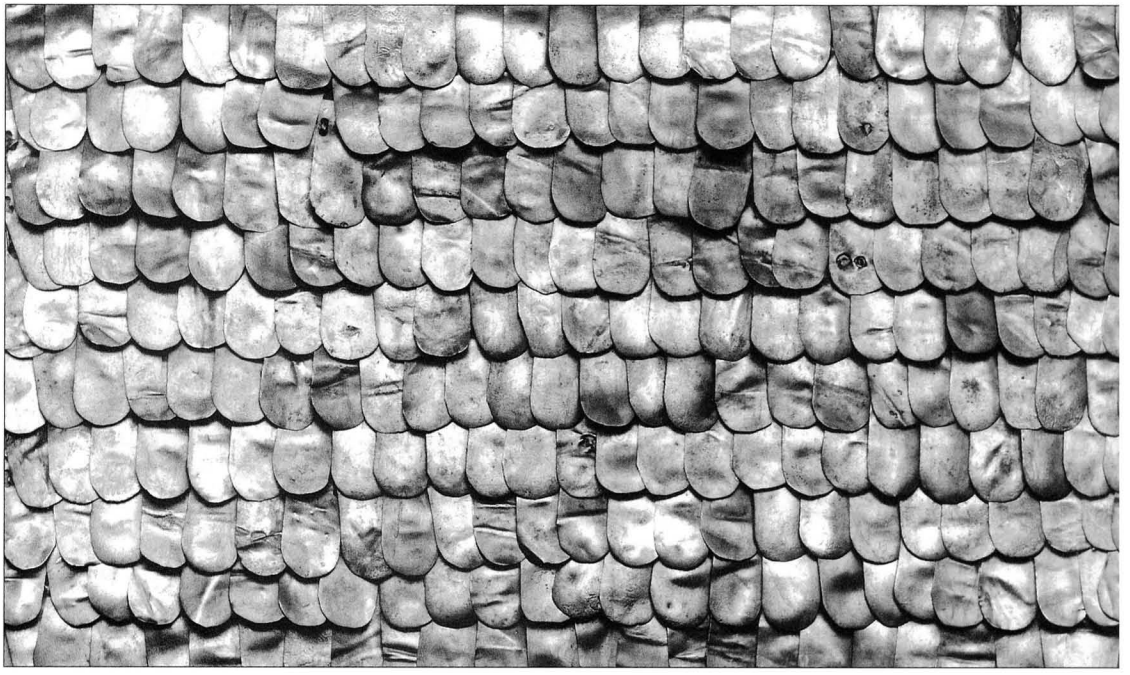
3. In 401 Alaric moves into Italy and after a series of Battles with the West Roman forces under Stilicho, comes to an arrangement where he returns to Illyricum to hold on behalf of the Western Empire, the region he previously held for the East.

4. Crossing the Rhine in mid winter a large number of Germanic tribes migrate into Gaul in 406. They overrun Gaul and in the years that follow, move south into Spain.

5. In 408, following the murder of Stilicho, Alaric again moves into Italy and is joined by another band of Goths from Pannonia under Athaulf. In 410 they sack Rome.

6. Alaric dies shortly after the sack of Rome and Athaulf leads the Goths into Gaul at the instigation of the Emperor Honorius who promises to recognise his kingdom if he defeats the several usurpers and other barbarian tribes in the region. Athaulf succeeds and is given the Emperor's half-sister Galla Placidia in marriage.

7. In 415 the Goths are given a commission to attack the Vandals, Alans and Suebi in Spain. After a successful campaign they form the Visigothic Kingdom in Aquitaine.



Scale armour was a reasonably common substitute for mail and was possibly more common in the east than the west. It was usually constructed of several rows of small bronze scales. Officers and guardsmen sometimes wore scale armour gilded in silver and/or gold. (National Museums of Scotland)

that number. Others put it down to a tactical superiority of cavalry over infantry, when in fact the battle was a classic infantry versus infantry clash with a timely cavalry charge swinging the balance. Some modern historians claim in all seriousness that the Gothic cavalry were successful because they rode with stirrups, which were not introduced in the west until the arrival of the Avars several centuries later.

The Romans lost the Adrianople campaign for a number of fairly mundane strategic as well as tactical reasons. At the strategic level, because of the constant threats along the frontiers, the Romans were simply unable to draw together enough high quality troops to deal quickly and decisively with the Gothic threat. Furthermore, all the Roman commanders, with the possible exception of Sebastian, acted with the typical arrogance of a well-equipped, 'civilised' army dealing with what they saw as a rabble. They allowed themselves to be drawn into battle on three occasions (Marcianople, Ad Salices and Adrianople) without proper preparation or reconnaissance and without ensuring that the odds were stacked in their favour before committing to a fight.

Finally it is quite probable that the quality and morale of the East Roman army was low before the campaign even began. Only 13 years earlier they had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Persians and the army had probably not fully recovered. Furthermore, like society, the army was torn apart by religious controversy as Pagans, Arian Christians and Catholic Christians fought and persecuted each other. It has been speculated that some of the cavalry, under the influence of Victor, the Catholic *Magister Equitum*, may have deliberately deserted Valens, who was an Arian. The Roman failings must also be matched against the strategic skill shown by Fritigern, who despite horrendous logistical problems, managed to dictate the terms and tempo of the campaign throughout.

At the tactical level the Gothic victory was won by relatively fresh troops fighting hot, tired and thirsty men who were surprised by the unexpected appearance of enemy reinforcements. The Roman cavalry performed poorly and showed an alarming lack of discipline. They were easily driven off, some deserting without a fight. Without cavalry support, the Roman infantry were hit in the flank while engaged to their front and despite some stubborn resistance by several units, the result was inevitable. Although the Roman infantry fought better than the cavalry at least one quite senior palatine unit (the *Batavi*) also fled the field without a fight.

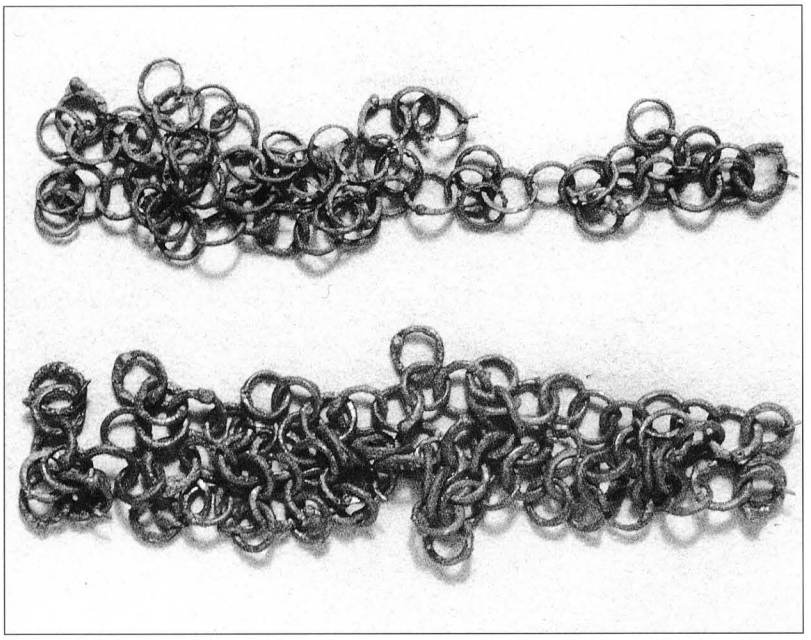
Significance of the Battle

The true significance of the Battle of Adrianople is the sort of thing historians love to debate. There can be no doubt that the battle was a catastrophic defeat for the Roman Empire. Emperors had been killed in battle before and Roman armies destroyed, but Adrianople exposed the Empire's strategic weakness and changed the balance of power for ever.

The Gothic victory at Adrianople and the subsequent failure of any Roman army to defeat them in battle, showed other people beyond the Rhine and Danube that it was possible to carve out a territory inside the Roman Empire. Franks, Alamanni, Burgundians, Suebi, Vandals, Sarmatians and yet more Alans and Goths, following the trail blazed by Fritigern's followers, pouring across the frontiers in the years after Adrianople. Meanwhile, Theodosius found that it was easier to incorporate the Goths into his own army and use them to fight his enemies than to recruit new Roman troops of dubious quality who would have to fight those same enemies as well as keep an eye on the Goths. Other generals also found that hiring a *comitatus* of Germans or Huns provided them with a loyal following who would not mutiny every time they were ordered to move to another region. After Adrianople the regular Roman troops gradually dropped in importance and the mobile *comitatenses* became more like the static *limitanei*. Ironically, although it was the eastern army which suffered the casualties at Adrianople, as it had in the Persian campaign 15 years earlier, it was the west that felt the long term effects of the battle. Theodosius' successful employment of the Goths against his western rivals set a precedent. From then on, whenever a particular band of barbarians became too troublesome in the east, they were given the status of Roman soldiers and encouraged to move west.

Had the Goths not won at Adrianople the subsequent history of the West Roman Empire would have been greatly different. It would be stretching a point to say that the Western Empire would not have fallen, but certainly the city of Rome would not have been sacked by Alaric in 410 and the whole pattern of Germanic migrations would have been greatly different.

This remnant of a 4th century statue shows detail of scale armour as worn by a Roman officer. The statue probably depicts an emperor and is copied from an earlier statue of Diocletian and his co-emperors. (Archaeological Museum, Istanbul)



Chain or link mail was the most common form of body armour in the fourth century. It was probably usually worn over a leather or padded garment to help absorb the force of a blow. (National Museums of Scotland)

Adrianople also led to changes in warfare, although these changes were evolutionary rather than revolutionary. The increased reliance on Germanic federates in Roman armies in the aftermath of the battle fundamentally changed the character of war. As the reliability of the regular army decreased, emperors, military commanders and even private citizens began to hire private bands of (usually Germanic) retainers. By the mid-5th century Roman field armies had evolved into large bands of mounted warriors owing allegiance directly to powerful warlords rather than the state. These armies had more in common with a feudal host than the classical legions.

Although the mounted warrior did become the key component of post Adrianople armies it would be wrong to conclude that this was a direct result of the success of the Gothic cavalry action in the battle. Cavalry in Roman armies had been steadily increasing in numbers since the 3rd century due to the need to move rapidly to deal with a crisis or sudden threat. The Germanic warrior who became the mainstay of the post Adrianople armies took this a step further. Fritigern's men and their descendants were neither infantry nor cavalry. When they could get horses they used them for strategic mobility, but they would fight on foot or mounted depending on the tactical situation. Several centuries after Adrianople when the quality of Roman infantry was at its lowest ebb, they could still hold off a succession of charges by elite Persian cavalry. Furthermore, the 6th century Goths, Gepids, Lombards and Heruls, who were virtually all mounted warriors, frequently dismounted to fight on foot.

THE BATTLEFIELD TODAY

The town of Edirne (Adrianople's modern name) can easily be reached by motorway in a little more than two hours' drive from Istanbul. There are also excellent bus connections with departures every 20 minutes from Istanbul and the trip taking three hours. There is a train but at time of writing the rail journey takes an unbelievable six hours!

Situated at the angle where the Turkish, Greek and Bulgarian borders meet, Edirne has the look and feel of a frontier town with a Balkan atmosphere. There are several hotels mostly catering to east European lorry drivers and Turkish guest workers travelling back from Germany and Austria. It is not necessary to book in advance except in early July when the annual oiled wrestling festival is held there. Advance booking and cash payment will, however, often secure a discount. There is also a wide variety of restaurants ranging from standard roadside

East Roman infantry and cavalry celebrate a triumph over the Persians, whose army often contained war elephants. The Sassanid Persians were a constant threat to the eastern frontier and it was very dangerous to withdraw troops such as these to deal with Gothic and other Germanic incursions in the west. (Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts, from the Arch of Galerius)

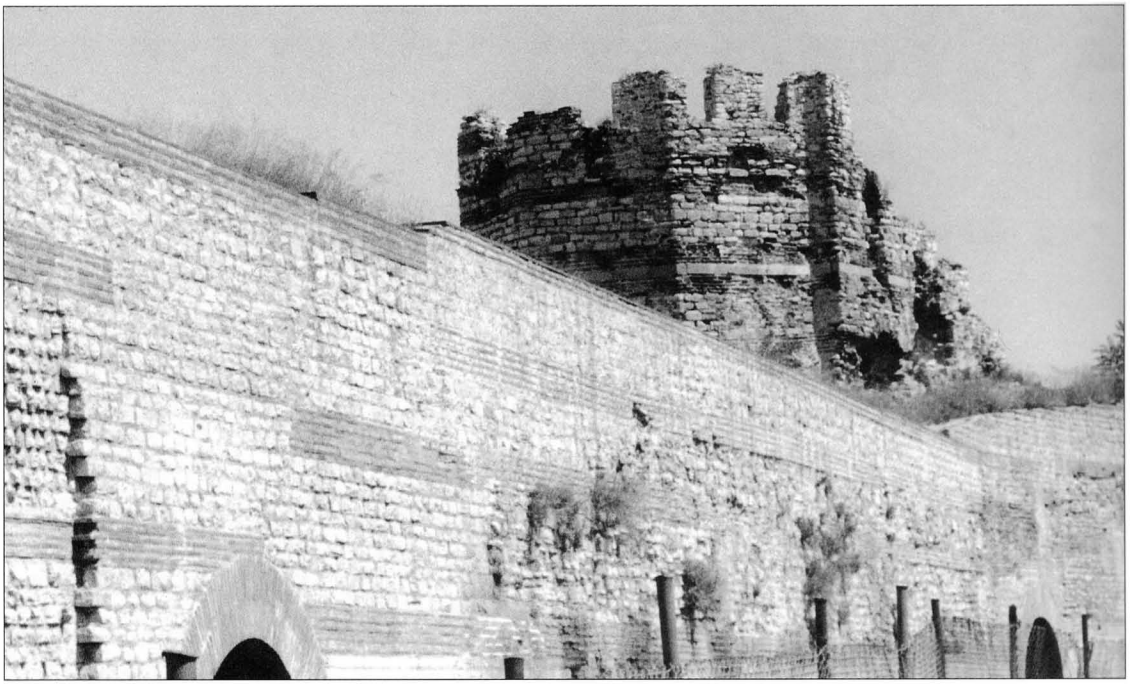
kebab vendors to full service establishments, some of which have lovely settings beside the Maritsa River. Food is good, simple, and very cheap by western European standards. In the centre of Edirne there are several relaxing tea gardens.

The town itself is, in summer, a hot, dusty place with very few western tourists despite the fact that it was once the capital of the Ottoman Empire and contains several beautiful mosques, including the Selimiye Camii, considered by many to be one of the finest examples of Ottoman architecture. Unfortunately there is very little left in the town that marks its Roman past and nowhere is there any mention of the battle of 378. There is a good if small archaeological museum but it is primarily devoted to the Ottoman period with only a scattering of Roman artefacts, none of which relate to the battle.

To tour the battlefield itself you will need a car, which can be rented in either Istanbul or Edirne. If travelling in summer it is worth getting air conditioning unless you want to feel the heat that so distressed the Roman army in 378. The temperatures in July and August often top 40°. You can easily explore the area in a half day from Edirne.

Heading north out of Edirne on a small but paved road you pass through the wheat and sunflower fields that are the trademark of the Thracian countryside. The road itself is virtually empty of traffic except for the odd tractor. After passing through the village of Büyük Döllük (speculatively identified, in the Bird's Eye Views, as the fortified farm where Valens may have died) you will immediately see the dominating ridge where the Goths were likely to have deployed. The ground around it is mostly open scrub-land and is easy to walk over and explore. Much of the area is also criss-crossed with minor farm roads which although unpaved can easily be driven with a normal car. You cannot see Muratçali

The walls of Constantinople kept the city safe from the Goths. Much of the city's defences can still be seen today; however, these walls were built by Theodosius II in the early 5th century. (Author's photo)



Roman cavalry from the Arch of Constantine. The typical dragon standards carried by most Roman units of the period can be seen in the upper left corner. (Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts)

until you are almost on top of it as it is neatly nestled behind the ridge but once there you can appreciate its value as an easily defendable camp site. It is also worth driving over to the Tundzha River to see how easy it would have been to hide several thousand horsemen from Roman view.

Unfortunately, unless you have your own car, it is very difficult to retrace the steps of the Goths back into Bulgaria. At the time of writing it is not possible to take a rented car from Turkey into another country and there are similar difficulties in the other direction. Public transport is not helpful as there is no direct route north to Jambol (ancient Cabyle). It is also difficult to cross the border from Edirne and it is often easier to get through transport from Istanbul to Plovdiv (Philippopolis). Travelling around Bulgaria to get to Stara Zagora (Beroea), Jambol, Burgas (Dibaltum), Devnja (Marcianopolis) and the Danube will also require a car and several days' travel time.

A more productive use of time would probably be several days' stay in Istanbul where the Roman past is very close to the surface. Apart from the obvious setting, still ringed with walls dating back to Theodosius II, and the Hagia Sophia from the time of Justinian, there is a wealth of late Roman sites and artefacts throughout the old city. The archaeological museum is well worth a visit as is the mosaic museum which is located in the excavated part of the Imperial palace. Although most of its artefacts date from a later period, the Istanbul Military Museum is a 'must-see' with its collection of Ottoman arms and armour, part of the chain that blocked entry to the Golden Horn before the Turkish conquest, a late Byzantine flag and a Turkish standard used in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. In the afternoon there is a concert by a Janissary band in full costume.

FURTHER READING

Primary Sources

Virtually all the definitive information about the Battle of Adrianople comes from Ammianus Marcellinus. He was a contemporary of the events he described and had the benefit of having been a serving Roman officer in the mid-4th century. He wrote his history of Rome some time in the 390s. Fortunately an abridged version of his works is readily available in the Penguin Classics series entitled *The Later Roman Empire AD 354-378*. The full version of his surviving books is also available in the Leob Classical Library Series in three volumes. The translation is a bit more stilted than the Penguin version but it benefits from having the Latin and English versions on facing pages.

Other primary sources are not readily available but accounts by contemporary or near contemporary authors are fairly widely quoted in modern books. Amongst these are Jordanes *Getica Romana* – a history of the Goths, and Zosimus's *New History*, which although not as reliable as Ammianus, carries the story of the campaign beyond 378.

Procopius' *History of the Wars* is worth reading to see how the Goths and Romans fought two centuries after Adrianople. It is available in the Leob Classical Library in seven volumes.

Vegetius' *De Re Militari* gives a confused description of the late 4th century army, through the eyes of a classicist who does not fully understand the military machine he is describing. Several older American translations exist but copies are not easily obtainable. It is worth reading but should not be taken at face value.

A version of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, edited by Otto Seeck is published by Minerva, Frankfurt am Main, and the illustrations can be obtained from the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Analysis of the document can be found in many modern sources such as A.H.M. Jones' *The Later Roman Empire* and Hoffman's *Das spätrömische Bewegungsheer und die Notitia Dignitatum*, which is unfortunately not available in English.

Secondary Sources

Most secondary sources do not add a great deal to our understanding of the Battle of Adrianople and many are quite misleading. There is however a large amount written about the Later Roman army which is useful and a few good books about the Goths and Huns. The following are relatively easy to get hold of and are worth seeking out:

Barker, P. *The Armies and Enemies of Imperial Rome*, Worthing, 1981. An excellent if brief overview of the Roman army and its enemies with an emphasis on dress and equipment.

Bishop, M.C., and Coulston, J.C.N., *Roman Military Equipment*, London, 1993. A definitive study of military equipment from the Republic to the 4th century.

Burns, T., *A History of the Ostrogoths*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1984. Most useful for the 5th and 6th century developments of the Ostrogothic kingdoms.

Delbrück, H., *The Barbarian Invasions*, trans. W. Renfroe, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1990. An American translation of Hans Delbrück's second volume of *Geschichte der Kreigskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* (Berlin, 1921). Anyone with the slightest interest in ancient and medieval warfare should seek out all volumes while they are in print. Delbrück brings a practical approach to his study which makes it stand above many other works. He gives an excellent analysis of the Battle of Adrianople, using evidence from 19th century Prussian campaigns in the same area to make sense of Ammianus' accounts. He also gives a convincing analysis of army numbers which unfortunately seem to have been ignored by many more recent historians.

Heather, P., *Goths and Romans 332-489*, Oxford, 1991. A superb in-depth look at the Goths and their interaction with Rome with a great deal of detail on the events surrounding the Adrianople campaign. Also: *The Goths*, Oxford, 1998. Basically an updated and slightly less academic version of the earlier book. Both are worth reading.

Jones, A.H.M., *The Later Roman Empire* (3 volumes), Oxford, 1964. The indispensable book for anyone with an interest in the Later Roman period which unfortunately is no longer in print. The chapter on the army is exceptionally good and is still the most authoritative study in English. There is also a detailed appendix on the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Also: *The Decline of the Ancient World*, Oxford, 1992. A recent reprint of an abridged version of the earlier book. Unfortunately much of the military detail has been cut, as has the useful appendix on the Notitia.

MacDowall, S., *Late Roman Infantryman* (Osprey, Warrior 9, London, 1994)

MacDowall, S., *Late Roman Cavalryman* (Osprey, Warrior 15, London, 1995)

MacDowall, S., *Germanic Warrior* (Osprey, Warrior 17, London, 1996)

All three of the above are from Osprey Publishing's *Warrior* Series. These are companion books to this Campaign volume, giving more detail on the individual men who fought at Adrianople.

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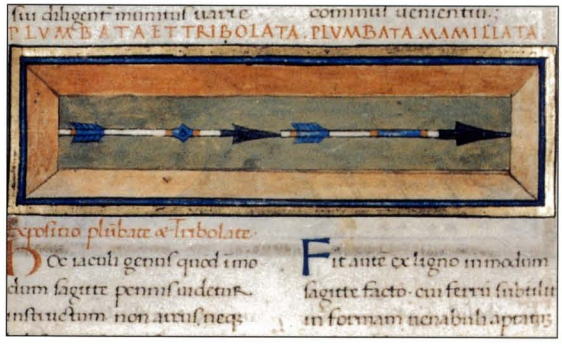

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